

TUESDAY, 9 FEBRUARY 2010

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 09.05)

2. Documents received: see Minutes

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

4. Presentation of the College of Commissioners and statement on the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission (debate)

President. – I would like to give a warm welcome to our sitting to the President of the European Commission, Mr Barroso, and the Commissioners-designate. Welcome, everyone. Welcome to our guests.

We have before us one of the most important decisions in this parliamentary term. For it is to us that the citizens of Europe have committed the task of electing the best European Commission. We have completed the hearings, and I have received 26 letters of recommendation. For the first time in history, we are electing the European Commission as a co-equal legislator. This puts us under an obligation to work especially closely with the European Commission. We represent two institutions of the European Union. In relation to this, we have entered, provisionally, into a new Framework Agreement, and today we are going to endorse it. We are going to vote on this agreement at 12.00. The vote will be held at 12.00. Before that, there may be a short break, if we finish the discussion early.

We want the Union to be represented by institutions which are more dynamic, and this is why the agreement is so important to us. We also have the good experience of recent months. The hour of direct discussion with the President of the European Commission, here in plenary, has been a great success. We are going to have similar contact with the Commissioners, with the Vice-Presidents of the European Commission, and so we are going to have an hour of questions and answers which will help us to understand the work of the Commission. There are also many solutions in our new Framework Agreement which we did not have before. In their work, the European Commission and the European Parliament must also take account of the opinions of national parliaments, which represent the principle of subsidiarity in the European Union.

I am sure this is not only the beginning of a new decade, but of a new way of working in the European Union. We all believe this. Thirty years after the first direct elections to the European Parliament, we stand before another great change. This is a new era in the work of the European Parliament – a European institution.

At the beginning of our discussion I would like to ask Mr Barroso to take the floor.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Commission shall promote the general interest of the Union and take appropriate initiatives to that end. It shall ensure the application of the treaties, and of measures adopted by the institutions pursuant to them. It shall oversee the application of Union law under the control of the Court of Justice of the European Union. It shall execute the budget and manage programmes. It shall exercise coordinating, executive and management functions, as laid down in the treaties. With the exception of the common foreign and security policy, and other cases provided for in the treaties, it shall ensure the Union's external representation. It shall ensure the Union's annual and multiannual programming with a view to achieving interinstitutional agreements.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know, that is the text of Article 17(1) of the Treaty on European Union, of the Treaty of Lisbon. I read it out because it shows the importance of the Commission when it comes to carrying out the European project, a Commission which, pursuant to the same article, is accountable as a College to your Parliament.

Thus, today, we are seeing European democracy in action. Today, your Parliament, made up of representatives directly elected by the European public, is being asked to give its verdict on the new College of Commissioners.

Supplementing as it does the vote on the President of the Commission, held on 16 September 2009, this vote is an essential part of the democratic legitimacy of the Commission, and hence of the European project as a whole.

The team standing before you today is ready to rise to the challenges ahead of it. It combines experience and new ideas; it reflects the broad range of approaches and sensibilities that make Europe this wonderful land of ideas. This is a team for which you can vote with confidence, a team that deserves your support.

And then? Then what? Will things return to how they were before? No, I refuse to believe – and our fellow citizens would not understand it – that, after these years of institutional debates, we will basically carry on as we were before. Indeed, we are living in exceptional times.

The challenges that the economic and financial crisis, climate change, and energy security – to name but a few – are presenting us with are quite simply too great for us not to change our approach.

This is a time for boldness. This is a time to show our citizens that we care, and that the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty will make a real difference in our ability to serve their interests. I believe that our economic and social situation demands a radical shift from the status quo, and the new treaty allows this.

Our task is to use the new mechanics to bring on new dynamics. So let us get away from the intellectual glamour of pessimism and constant denigration of the European Union that is doing so much damage to Europe's image. Let us move the discussion from institutional input to policy impact.

What Europe needs to succeed is policies focused on results, better governance structures and confidence in our own ability to solve the problems we face. Our common currency, the euro, will continue to constitute a major tool for our development, and those who think it can be put in question must realise we will stick to our course. The European Union has the necessary framework to address all challenges that can appear in this matter.

We can start by asking ourselves: does the European Union count in the world? And the answer is 'yes'. But does the European Union count as much as it should in the world? The answer is 'not yet'.

Europe counts when we speak with a strong and united voice, when the European interest is clearly defined and vigorously defended: in trade, for example, and competition policy. It is less successful when we act according to narrow national interests, in an uncoordinated way or in areas where collectively, the European Union is not able to defend and promote its collective interest.

So, in summary, we have to ask ourselves: are we doing everything we can to define and defend the European interest – an interest that is more than the sum of its parts? Frankly, I believe we have to do more. We need to set our work in an overall, longer-term vision of where we want the European Union to be. This will ensure coherence and offer a sense of direction that actors across Europe can recognise and support.

The political guidelines I presented to this House are the starting point for this vision of 'Europe 2020'. They are the fruit of our experience over the last five years. And, not least, they are the fruit of intensive discussions with this House. Thanks to your strong support for these guidelines, I regard them as a useful point of departure for us.

The broad priorities are clear: making a successful exit from the crisis; leading on climate action and energy efficiency; boosting new sources of growth and social cohesion to renew our social market economy; advancing a people's Europe with freedom and security; and opening a new era for global Europe. I believe in a Europe that is open and generous, a Europe that is particularly dedicated to the Millennium Development Goals.

I believe in a Europe that shows solidarity to others, as we have shown recently in Haiti, where we have contributed in an important way with emergency aid, and we will also contribute with significant reconstruction aid. But we can achieve more with better coordination at European level, and I will make proposals in this sense, exploring the new opportunities offered by the treaty; also, the European External Action Service will be a very important instrument to make our foreign policy more coherent and effective.

I can promise you that, if this College is granted your support, we will set to work straightaway, turning the political guidelines into an ambitious work programme – a work programme which I want to discuss with you.

Our Europe 2020 vision is both a structural and comprehensive reform strategy and an exit and recovery strategy. So we will make sure we embed short-term measures to get Europe working again into our longer-term objectives, promoting jobs through sustainable growth.

We will spend the next five years turning our vision into reality: making Europe a resource-efficient, inclusive, social market economy – reflecting what makes us special, the European way of life. This means growth based on knowledge and innovation; improving our productivity by increasing our R&D and innovation performance; better exploiting the potential of ICTs and creating a digital single market; raising education outcomes; and promoting skills.

This means an inclusive, high-employment society: empowering people through high levels of employment, using flexicurity, modernising labour markets and social protection, fighting poverty with a view to building a more inclusive society.

This means greener growth: building a competitive and sustainable economy, tackling climate change, accelerating the roll-out of smart grids and genuine EU-scale networks, modernising the EU's industrial base, and turning the European Union into a resource efficient economy.

To achieve these goals, we must recognise that the interdependence of our economies requires better and more coordination. Some national politicians, let us face it, are not in favour of a more coordinated approach in economic policy. But, if we want to overcome the crisis, reinforce the social dimension and establish a good basis for a strong economic future for Europe in the globalised world, if we want to reinforce our industrial base and launch new common European projects and not just bilateral ones, then stronger economic coordination is the only way forward.

Other very important challenges need to be tackled during this mandate. We have already mapped out a very ambitious and far-reaching programme in the field of justice and home affairs. This not only includes the fight against terrorism and crime; it also includes addressing the very important priority of a common approach to migration. In this area, we show to our citizens our commitment to both freedom and security.

During this mandate, we will also focus on the budget review and new financial perspectives. We believe that we should concentrate on the quality of the expenditure, on its European added value and on its effectiveness, so that the financial perspectives become an instrument to realise the ambitions of Europe: for our strategy for growth and jobs, and also for the goals of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

This can only come from strong European institutions and a determination to raise our level of ambition, to deliver change. So it is most welcome that a key change in the treaty is the strengthening of all the European institutions.

I intend to use this to reinforce the contribution we can all make to the European project, together. This is no time for our institutions to pull in different directions. But, of course, the Commission will always have a special relationship with Parliament, as, under the Community method, we are the two institutions with a specific role to identify, articulate and give reality to the European interest.

That makes us the two Community institutions par excellence, with a particular responsibility for ensuring that the European Union is more than the sum of its parts. It was in this spirit that I offered in my political guidelines presented to you a special relationship with Parliament. It is in this spirit that we have discussed a new Framework Agreement, the principles of which are embodied in the resolution before the House today.

This Framework Agreement should drive forward our common efforts to deliver genuinely European responses to the issues faced by Europeans today. So, as well as updating the agreement to reflect the Lisbon Treaty, it must set out new ways in which we will make cooperation a day-to-day reality.

It must help us to fashion a new culture of partnership and purpose, to use our common leverage to offer a real advance for the European project. Also, several of these issues imply cooperation with the Council. So I would very much welcome a broader agreement which unites the colegislators, together with the Commission, on a set of principles for interinstitutional cooperation.

I said we need to be bold. I said we cannot go on as if it is business as usual. I have outlined many innovations, and our priorities to tackle the social situation. I am convinced they will strengthen our institutions and help

us achieve our goals, in full respect of our values. Because let us never forget that our Union is founded on values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

Today, a new chapter in our European adventure opens. Let us work together to make it a real success – for all our citizens.

(Applause)

President. – That was the presentation of the College of Commissioners and a statement about the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the European Commission. The presentation was given by Mr Barroso. We are discussing both of these matters. The vote on the Framework Agreement will take place punctually at 12.00, then there will be a break until 13.30, and then we will proceed to the vote on the College of Commissioners – that is today's order of business.

I would also like to greet the representatives of the European Council, the rotating Presidency and the Spanish Government. We welcome all who are with us today and are listening to our conversation. Welcome.

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE Group. – (FR) Mr President, Mr López Garrido, President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, today we are going to give our verdict on the appointment of the new European Commission, an essential act which confirms the prerogatives of this Parliament and which will determine the way in which the Union functions for several years.

However, before placing on record the confidence that my group and I have in the Barroso II Commission, I wish to voice my opinion on the context in which it will be required to work. On this matter, I must say that the people of Europe are not yet convinced that the Treaty of Lisbon is working properly. We expect a great deal of this treaty, and we must do our utmost to ensure that it is a new, positive stage in the European adventure.

Legislation is not everything, however. The women and men who apply it must measure up to our ambitions. They must ensure that Europe's stature in the world is equal to its message, its wealth and its successes. The fact is, the European machine is obviously still in need of some adjustments.

Thus, we are now endowed with a High Representative, who is also Vice-President of the European Commission and, as such, accountable to this House. This key figure must be the voice of Europe in the world. Her presence and her ambition must embody that of the Union, the world's biggest economy in terms of GDP, the world's biggest market, the biggest contributor to international aid.

The fact is, from Haiti to Iran, from Afghanistan to Yemen, from Cuba to the transatlantic relations that we hold dear, Europe's voice has not lived up to our hopes thus far. Our group calls for drastic action to ensure that we change our approach and start off on the right foot this time. With this in mind, Mr Barroso, we are also counting on your personal commitment and on your leadership.

We are also counting on the new President of the European Council to embody the Union on the international stage, to initiate and chair meetings of the Heads of State or Government, and to act as a reference point. We must give him time to make his mark, but I already note with satisfaction that his first steps are along the right lines.

From the Council of Ministers, I expect nothing less than close cooperation, on equal terms – and I mean on equal terms – with this House. However, the example of SWIFT shows us the extent of the progress to be made.

Lastly, from the Commission – and I know that President Barroso shares this point of view – I expect an exemplary working relationship and relationship of trust. Moreover, the Framework Agreement on which we will vote this lunchtime reflects this common will of our two institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have come to the end of an exercise in which we have scrutinised the members of the Commission, and I wish to commend this exercise of modern democracy that, to date, no other parliament in Europe carries out.

Nonetheless, we still have a great deal to do before we are equal to our task, which is to be able to judge politicians from a political perspective. We must improve our procedures still further, and make them more relevant and more focused on the content of European policies.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am well aware that, at this early stage in the introduction of the new treaty, not everything can be done straight away. However, we must be ambitious. This is the spirit in which we are approaching this debate, which must result in the appointment of the new Commission: a Commission which, under the leadership of Mr Barroso and with experienced commissioners, is well-equipped to tackle Europeans' problems; a Commission with which we share both the main political objectives and the prognoses concerning the problems to be addressed or the solutions to be applied to those problems; a Commission that reflects the results of the 2009 European elections, and within which my political family, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), is the most influential force; a Commission, lastly, whose main priority is to meet the expectations of Europeans hit by the crisis, Europeans who also often suffer from pessimism and who are concerned about the ability of their leaders to defend and promote the European model in the world.

That is why the PPE Group will vote to appoint the Commission.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, during the course of the hearings, my impression of the Commission was one of Abbot José Manuel with his 26 novices from the order of Trappist monks. That is an order that has taken a vow of silence. It seemed as though the Abbot had said to his novices 'better to say nothing than to say something wrong'. That was detrimental in the hearings for some of the new people. It was surprising to see someone like Neelie Kroes, who is otherwise so eloquent, suddenly spouting out trite phrases. Others, like Joaquín Almunia, Michel Barnier, the new Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič and even Mrs Georgieva, did not take the vow of silence and, once this vow of silence was lifted, demonstrated that, if you are so bold as to enter into dialogue with Parliament, you can achieve a higher profile than if you allow yourself to be manipulated.

(Applause)

At the same time, Mr Almunia and Mr Barnier revealed the roles they intend to play in the future Commission. It was interesting to observe the division of the portfolios of the individual members of the Commission, including during the hearings. There are so many contradictory assignments, so many structures that make conflicts of competence almost inevitable and that will require an arbitrator to ultimately decide on the direction in which to go – that was interesting.

On one hand, the commissioners are told 'I will speak here' and on the other, 'in cases of conflicts of competence, I will ultimately decide'. I certainly do not want to do the Roman Emperor a disservice, but this, Mr Barroso, seems very much like you want to operate according to the principle of 'divide and rule'. This, however, is the wrong approach. You need to understand that anyone who wants to turn a College into a presidential system is undertaking a huge task and, in the end, must be prepared to be told that the buck stops with him and that he must take the responsibility for the shortcomings.

The Commission is strong when it acts as a collegial body. It is strong when it does not see itself as a technocratic administrative leader, but understands that the challenges facing us require transnational European responses. The question that you raised at the beginning of your speech – does the European Union count in the world? – is indeed on the agenda. This question will not be answered by you tailoring everything to your own needs, but by you organising the responsibilities of your Commission so efficiently that, in cooperation with us, the European Parliament, the Commission can provide the answers.

The economic and financial crisis, the environmental crisis and the social crisis faced by this continent require transnational European answers. They do not require renationalisation. That is why we need a strong Commission that can find support from a strong majority in Parliament. However, it must not be tailored to José Manuel Durão Barroso, but must instead reflect the wide range of capabilities that all of the commissioners bring.

(Applause)

An answer to the question of whether the European Union counts in the world could be seen in Copenhagen. If we become fragmented when it comes to environmental legislation and if Europe pursues renationalisation instead of taking an ambitious Union-based approach, then we will also see in other areas what we saw in Copenhagen, namely that the decisions are taken by Barack Obama and Hu Jintao, without European involvement. Anyone who does not want the world to descend into a new type of bipolarity needs a strong Europe and an ambitious Europe. We therefore also need an effective Commission that will take on this role.

Mr Barroso, in the debate on the interinstitutional agreement, you made two concessions, which, in my view, are crucial. The impact assessment, and the social impact assessment in particular, is, for us as Social Democrats and as Socialists and Democrats, an essential element. The Commission needs to realise, and that means all of the individual Members of this Commission, that what made large parts of the European population turn away from the European idea had something to do with the fact that the people of Europe had the feeling that this Commission was only interested in the market and not, for example, in social protection for its citizens. More and more people have the feeling that cold technocracy rather than social welfare is what determines the actions of the Commission. If that trend now changes direction with the social impact assessment that we are agreeing on, then we will have made a great deal of progress.

That also applies, incidentally, to the measures in this interinstitutional agreement with which we are in agreement, namely that the future legislative resolutions of the European Parliament will be turned into Commission initiatives within a year. That is also an enormous step forward in the cooperation between our two institutions. A Trappist abbot, who, together with Herman Non-Country, the President of the European Council, is to represent Europe in the world – Mr Daul, that will not do. What we need is effective cooperation between the European institutions.

However, Mr Barroso cannot be blamed for everything. There are also 27 Heads of Government in Europe who believe that the Commission is the extended arm of their government offices. The answer we need to this is close cooperation between the European Parliament and a Commission that feels duty-bound to work for social and environmental progress in Europe. That is what will make the European Union count in the world. If we address this together, then, following your response to this, Mr Barroso, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament will discuss in the break what we will ultimately decide to do. After the discussion in our group, and following your response, I will then present this decision in the second round.

(Applause)

Guy Verhofstadt, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, on behalf of my group, I am delighted to be here today and to finally have the Barroso II Commission before us. I believe that this is a good thing, because we are bringing to an end what was a bad period for the European Union. The absence, for six months, of a Commission equipped with real powers is something that should not be repeated in the future, especially in this period of economic and financial crisis, in which there are major issues such as climate change, Copenhagen, and so on.

In any case, trust in my experience when I say that, in future, there must be no more periods in which the Commission provides no real governance, especially when they last for as long as six months. I hope that this Commission will embark on its work as quickly as possible, as soon as we have voted.

For our part, Mr Barroso, we expect three things of you. Firstly, that this new Commission will be the driving force behind the European Union; we believe that this has not been the case over the last five years. This time, we want a Commission that will leave the last five years behind and become the real driving force behind a far more intensive integration of the European Union. Indeed, everything that has happened over the last few weeks and months shows that what makes Europe's position in this multipolar world problematic is the fact that there is no common outlook and not enough European integration – I am thinking of Copenhagen and the lack of coordination in Haiti. We therefore call for a Commission which, unlike what we have seen over the last few years, does not always seek an immediate compromise with the Council before coming and presenting it to us and trying to make us swallow it.

Our expectation of the Commission is that it will present ambitious projects to the Council – even if we know in advance that it will not receive 100% support – and that it will subsequently call on the European Parliament, as its influential ally, in order to convince the Council.

(Applause)

The second thing that we expect of the Commission – and I am going to repeat what Mr Schulz has already said, but I believe that it is important – is that it will work as a College. A Commission President who is strong is all very well, but a College, a Commission that is strong and which demonstrates its cohesion, is essential and is far more important still. Therefore, we really do expect this kind of Commission because, for the first time – and you have acknowledged this, Mr Barroso – it is a Commission composed of the three main political families present in this House. I am delighted that there are eight liberal commissioners in charge of some very important portfolios. This Commission must now operate internally as a coalition between these three

movements and these three political parties and must try to reach compromises supported by the entire Commission and by the entire College.

Lastly, the third priority of this Commission, in our opinion, is obviously to combat the economic crisis, and I believe that the most urgent task is to present as quickly as possible to Parliament and the Council a credible strategy for Europe 2020. That is the most important task. Be ambitious on this point, Mr Barroso. Do not listen too much to the Member States; listen instead to the Spanish Presidency, because it has some good ideas on this subject. Come armed with ambitious projects. Do not think that weak coordination of national economic strategies is sufficient. In tomorrow's world and in the multipolar world, we need much more than that. We need socio-economic governance of the European Union. It is not enough to have a monetary pillar such as the euro area; an economic and social pillar is also needed in the euro area and in the European Union. This is the strategy that we expect from you because it will be crucial to the future of Europe and to the future of our fellow citizens.

(Applause)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I must admit that this is unbelievable. We have before us the coalition of hypocrites. It is just before St Valentine's Day, and Mr Barroso is being told: 'I love you, but I do not love you. I do not believe you, but I am going to vote for you anyway'. So, this is really ...

Yes, Mr Schulz, you make a great statement when you say, 'we are going to think about it', when everyone knows that you are going to vote for the Commission. That is a great political strategy, that is!

(Applause)

I wish to say something ... I do not know why you are getting all worked up, Mr Schulz! You are not the President of Parliament yet! Calm down, my friend, calm down!

For my part – and Mr Schulz should have his speaking time cut by 30 seconds – I would like to say some very simple things, between ourselves. We have some large groups, which are going to support the Barroso Commission. They are incapable of producing a resolution together to explain why they support the Commission.

Incapable! Why? Because they are not in favour of the Commission – and at least Mr Verhofstadt is clear when he says, 'I am in favour of the liberals', and the other one is in favour of the PPE, and the other one is in favour of the socialists ...

(Comment off-microphone by Mr Verhofstadt: 'and you are in favour of the Greens')

Me? No, there are none. But, yes ... as you know, Mr Verhofstadt, ours is the only group to have been critical, even when there was a Green in the Commission. This is not the way we do politics. We need to know whether this Commission will have a vision, ambition and determination.

What has been said is true. The majority of the Commissioners-designate – I do not say all – had no determination, vision or ambition. However, when considering the Commission as a whole, the sum of the minuses is a plus. That is the new mathematical formula of the Barroso Commission.

No, it does not work like that. Therefore, Mr Barroso, I like it when you read the text of the treaty to us: initiatives, what initiatives? What initiative did the Commission come up with to address the crisis in Greece? Solidarity, where is it? In Spain, where is it? I have not seen it; I have not heard it.

Let me give you a piece of advice. One of Greece's problems is its defence budget. 4.3% of Greece's GDP goes on defence. What is the problem? The problem is Cyprus; it is the relationship with Turkey. Where is the Commission's initiative when it comes to solving the Cyprus issue, so that Greece's GDP is finally relieved of this stupid, idiotic conflict, which we, as Europeans, should be resolving? The Commission's initiative: it does not have one!

The same point has been made with regard to Haiti. Baroness Ashton, I know that you are not a fire-fighter, a midwife or any other such person. However, I still want you to come up with ideas; I want you to defend something. You always tell us: 'it is important, we must coordinate, I am going to coordinate ...'. We do not know why it is important, we do not know the hierarchy of what is important, but we do know that you regard everything as important. We will not make progress like that.

Therefore, I believe that we have a problem. We have a fundamental problem here, and that is that we, as a Parliament, finally have to demonstrate our *rapprochement* with the Commission. And, of course, we will work with the Commission, of course we will work with the commissioners, of course – I know – there will be a majority.

What I would like for once, however, is for us to stop all the trite comments, to stop all the meaningless statements. We want a political Europe. Every time the opportunity arises to have a political Europe, we blow it! When, in Copenhagen, Europe was due to make progress, we blew it!

I would like it if, at some point, Mr Barroso and the commissioners – past and future – told us why they blew it, why Europe was not political, why Europe was not a global player. Mr Verheugen is leaving the Commission. He was the number two in the Commission, and he is telling Germany and anyone else who will listen that Europe was not a global player, that Europe did not play its role. He is not saying why he did not play his role.

It is always someone else, and I would like it if, for once, in this Commission, in this debate, we heard no more of the meaningless comments that Mr Schulz, Mr Verhofstadt and Mr Daul come out with: 'the best thing would be to reject this Commission so that, together, we can finally get to grips with what is really happening in the world'.

What is really happening in the world is that Europe is failing to cope with the economic crisis, the environmental crisis and the financial crisis. There are enough of them. There are enough of those who cannot stand being deceived by their soothing words – they have already tricked us, they tell us: 'we are against, we are against', and, in the end, they abstain. 'We are against, we are against, but we will vote in favour.' That is unworthy of this Parliament. Let us wake up, because Europe needs it!

(Applause)

Jan Zahradil, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, President Barroso, my group, the ECR Group, supported you together with the Liberals and the People's Party, and without this, you would not be sitting here. We supported you when others did not and we supported you because of your longstanding reputation as a reformer. We would be delighted if you fully lived up to that reputation in this election period.

I remember when, in 2005, you came along with an interesting idea about simplifying European legislation and cutting through the now impenetrable undergrowth of community law. I would like you to return to that idea, as it was a good one. We are living in the period of the Lisbon Treaty, we are living in a period when the adoption of new legislation will be even easier and I would therefore like to ask you not to allow the European economy to be smothered with outgrowths of unjustified and ill-founded regulation, not to allow the victory of modish, politically correct themes which could become an excuse for further centralisation, further regulation and further bureaucratisation of the European Union.

If you take this route, you can rely on us. If you take the path of reform, if you show yourself to be a genuine reformer, then you can count on our support and cooperation. If, however, you stick to the old ways and tread the smooth and well-worn paths, then we reserve the right to disagree with you and even to oppose you. I would like to hope, Mr President, that there will be far more of the former than the latter and that we will be able to cooperate to a much greater degree and to stand on the same side of the barricades, rather than on opposite sides. I wish you much success in this.

Lothar Bisky, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, in September 2009, I had to tell you that your political guidelines were continuing a failed Commission policy. Your neoliberal guidelines do not reveal a strategy for more social justice, nor do they provide better protection for Europe against crises. They provide no basis for the work to successfully combat poverty and social exclusion in Europe. Now you are presenting to us the College of Commissioners that best suits your programme. You can expect no applause for this from my group.

Already during this new parliamentary term, this Parliament has demonstrated that it takes democratic control and codetermination seriously, and I very much welcome that. I am thinking of the new Framework Agreement between Parliament and the Commission and of the rejection of one of the candidate Commissioners, and I hope that, tomorrow, Parliament will once again be conscientious in its addressing of the SWIFT agreement.

Transparency and fairness are vital in the agreements between the institutions – only when we have these can we begin to talk about policy. It is about the people of Europe and the rest of the world, it is about good jobs and more rights to a good education and fair pay, it is about their right to peaceful development and an

intact environment. Therefore, Mr Barroso, my group will not support your guidelines or your staffing proposal. Prepare yourself for our harsh, but fair, exchange of views with you and your College.

Nigel Farage, on behalf of the EFD Group. – Mr President, what we have before us here is the new government of Europe, a government that, with the Lisbon Treaty, now has enormous powers, not just a Foreign Minister and embassies, not just the ability to sign treaties, but the ability now to use emergency powers to literally take countries over, and yet what we have heard from the European Parliament's big group leaders this morning is the demand that you take even more powers and do it even more quickly.

Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that this treaty that gives this Commission these powers does not have democratic legitimacy in the European Union at all. You ignored referendums, you denied referendums, and you bullied the poor Irish into voting a second time.

I am struck that the common denominator with this Commission is the sheer number of them that were communists, or were very close to communism. Mr Barroso himself was a Maoist. Siim Kallas, far from being a student activist, was even a member of the Supreme Soviets – we have top-notch communists there. Baroness Ashton ran CND and still refuses to tell us whether she took money from the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Now I could go on but we would be here for some time. But we have at least 10 communists in this Commission and it must feel like a return to the good old days. There must be certain nostalgia amongst the communists. Whilst, 60 years ago, an Iron Curtain fell across Europe, today we have the iron fist of the European Commission. We have seen it with Article 121 and with Greece effectively being turned into a protectorate.

Poor Greece, trapped inside the economic prison of the euro! Poor Greece, trapped inside the modern day *Völkerkerker* for which it appears there is no way out! What Greece needs, Mr Barroso, is devaluation, not sado-monetarism. Goodness knows what that is going to do to them.

In 1968, we had the Brezhnev doctrine of limited sovereignty. Today we have 'shared values'. We have an 'ever-closer European Union' and 'pooled sovereignty' and that is what you have used, but of course it will not just be Greece, because the same is going to happen to Spain, to Portugal and to Ireland. Article 121 will be invoked with all of those.

Mr Barroso, you said earlier that we will stick to our course, and that means millions of people in Europe will be put through pain as you attempt to keep together this disastrous project that is the euro. It will fall to pieces; of that there can be no doubt, as surely as it did for Britain during the exchange rate mechanism in 1992. You can laugh, you can smile. It will not work. It cannot work. It will fall to pieces, and, as far as the peoples of Europe are concerned, the sooner it does the better.

We need democratic solutions to this. If you go on pushing your extreme euro-nationalism, this will lead to violence. We must vote against this Commission. We must put the future of Europe to people in every Member State in free and fair referendums.

Zoltán Balczó (NI). – (HU) The European Commission is the European Union's defining decision-making body. Requirements as regards Commissioners should be the following: the right person, based on his or her career path and preparedness, in the right position. The manner in which Commissioners are nominated and elected, however, ensures that this positive outcome is achieved only incidentally. Governments do not recommend people for a particular assignment, but for an office. Anyone they nominate will – unless he or she withdraws – become an EU commissioner. The President of the Commission is trying to find an assignment for the person in question, and thus the sequence is reversed. This means that I am trying to find a coat to match the button. Something else that is worth mentioning: the specialised committees' hearings are not followed by a vote, but instead, a small circle of people write letters about the hearing. You are always talking about democracy, and yet are still afraid of direct elections. Whether it be the EU constitution, a referendum or a committee meeting about a potential candidate. In the course of the hearings, the Commissioners-designate scarcely said anything concrete. They did not want to make a commitment, to accept responsibility. Even so, it nonetheless became clear that they are not breaking with the former Commission, but want a centralised Europe; they have not drawn the lessons of the financial crisis, but continue to follow liberal economic policy. There are many of us, therefore, who will not vote for this Commission, and that does not make us anti-Europeans. We are simply doing what our voters – many million European citizens – expect of us.

József Szájer (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, Mr Barroso, in a significant number of European languages, the notion that something operates – it is able to operate – and that something is working, is expressed in very similar terms. We are now at a time in the European Union when we can say ‘back to work, Europe’; let us go back, let us work, let us operate. The basis for doing so is guaranteed by the new Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Treaty of Lisbon, a recently elected Parliament and the new Commission now being formed.

It is time for us to leave behind the days of institutional disputes and of establishing institutional ground rules, and truly to turn our attention to and focus on the cares and questions of European citizens. This is of fundamental importance because we need to regain the support of those people whom we have lost along the way. Ladies and gentlemen, honourable Members of Parliament, we all have work to do in this regard. The proceedings of the past few weeks and months have not always been honourable. For instance, this Parliament did not afford one of the Commissioners-designate a fair opportunity to be heard. Let us therefore judge the Commission, let us judge the Council, let us work with it, but let us sometimes take a look at ourselves as well. The close collaboration of these institutions is necessary in order to achieve results.

Mr Commission President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like on behalf of my party as well to wish you much success, for when we wish you much success, we do so not to several individuals but to the citizens of Europe. May Europe, in the eyes of European citizens, be a true example at last of job creation, prosperity, development, an active presence in the world, equity, and now, on the basis of its new constitution, the Treaty of Lisbon, may Europe grow up and come into its own.

Ladies and gentlemen, when my computer is not working, I press the restart button. Now we even have new software in this computer, known as the Treaty of Lisbon. Ladies and gentlemen, let us press that restart button.

Hannes Swoboda (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, your Commission certainly has both strong and weak points. I would like to focus on the strong points.

We have a foreign policy team that you would be hard pressed to find anywhere else, with regard to both foreign policy and development policy. Mr Szájer, you cannot deny that we have a better team now than we had at the time of the original hearing of the first candidate from Bulgaria. I also firmly believe that Baroness Ashton will coordinate this team well.

The single telephone number that Henry Kissinger allegedly demanded is brought up again and again. Maybe we do not have this single telephone number, but if you make a comparison with the United States – in connection with climate protection, for example – who should we call? President Obama or the Senate, which has so far refused to find a solution? With regard to the issue of disarmament, should we contact President Obama, who is in favour of disarmament, or the Senate, which has not come up with any solutions? Let us not always make ourselves out to be worse than we are! We have an opportunity now to make a good impression.

(Applause)

Where economic policy is concerned, we have a strong team. I hope and believe that those of our colleagues in the Commission who did not come across so strongly in the hearings will develop that strength as time goes by. When it comes to social policy, we have a Commissioner who takes matters seriously and a Commission President who has also promised us that he will give priority to social affairs and social policy. We are counting on this. We are not only counting on it, we will also press for it to actually happen.

Together, we found solutions for a number of areas in the Framework Agreement. We disagreed sometimes, but we worked well together. It is a very good agreement if we take it seriously – you in the Commission and we in the European Parliament. If we manage to get the Council to take seriously the principles of transparency contained in the agreement, then we really will be able to achieve something magnificent.

As a result of the Treaty of Lisbon and the Framework Agreement, from the beginning of the legislative process right through to its end, to implementation, there will be a level of transparency that is perhaps not the case in many national parliaments. I therefore call on the Commission and the Council to take this seriously.

In the case of SWIFT, transparency has not been taken seriously – by the Commission or the Council. We now have a Member of the Commission who was responsible for the Council. This is a practice that we in this Parliament can no longer tolerate. The reason for this mess is not that Parliament is likely to be obstinate.

Rather, it is because, even during the transition, when it was already clear that this Parliament still had more to say, the Council and the Commission – particularly the Council – did not understand that they had to involve Parliament. That is the bottom line. In this regard, Mr Barroso, with the legislative resolutions and the obligation on the part of the Commission to respond – either with its own draft legislation or with a clear explanation for why it is not going to take action – we have made significant progress. Let us not pretend that the parliamentary right of initiative has always been as significant in the national parliaments. They are essentially dominated by the governments, and what the government proposes is often implemented in the parliaments. This is not the case here. The Commission's proposals are not yet legislation for us. We work on them so that our own ideas, too, are incorporated.

Let us seize this opportunity with the new Commission, a new treaty and a new Framework Agreement. Let us, as Parliament, be confident in our dealings with the Commission.

President. – Now the floor will be taken for the first time in this debate by a woman. It is a pity that this is happening so late.

Diana Wallis (ALDE). – Mr President, I hope it is worth waiting for. I want to concentrate on the resolution on the Framework Agreement, having been part of Parliament's negotiating team.

President Barroso, we had, I think you will admit, some very interesting debates on the meaning of words, especially in my language, but one of the phrases you used at the beginning of our meetings was that you spoke about your absolute commitment to the 'parliamentary dimension' of the European Union, and I think you were absolutely genuine and positive in your use of that phrase, yet we never discussed that one. Post-Lisbon, and post the resolution on the new Framework Agreement, this Parliament is much more than a mere 'dimension' – it is a reality, a real force, a true parliament worthy of the name.

You might, I suppose, call the original parliamentary assembly a 'dimension', but not this parliament. This parliament is now a full legislative partner, as per the resolution, to be treated on an equal, inclusive and informed basis with Council and not to be by-passed by resorting to soft law or other instruments, however worthy; a parliament fully and rightly able to hold your Commission, as executive, to account. We look forward to seeing not only yourself, Mr Barroso, but all of your fellow commissioners here for a question hour before this Chamber.

This Parliament will insist on its right of oversight in respect of subsequent changes to your team; this Parliament is ready to play its proper role as the only transnational, directly elected parliament in international relations. But, above all, this new forceful Parliament, containing a pro-European majority, wants you – please – to take a lead, and in that we will be your willing partner and supporter. But, please, we are no mere 'dimension'; we are a true, real Parliament.

Jill Evans (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, the motion for a resolution from the Greens/EFA Group calls for a new political approach at national and European level and for new ideas and firm action. We cannot overcome the economic, social and climate crisis we face using the same policies and mindset that created them; we cannot build a more democratic and more effective Europe unless we do so within the real and changing political climate.

Today, in Wales, the national Assembly is starting the process for a referendum on more law-making powers. In Catalonia, in Scotland, in Flanders and elsewhere, there are changes taking place. Tomorrow, we discuss the enlargement of the EU to include countries currently outside its borders, but we have not even begun to address internal enlargement, the process whereby countries inside the EU's borders gain independence. These questions have not been answered in the debates on the election of the new Commission, despite the changes happening around us. I would ask President Barroso, once again, to address those questions.

Adam Bielan (ECR). – (PL) Mr Barroso, five months ago, I voted in favour of entrusting you with the mission of creating the European Commission, because I thought you were the best of the candidates under consideration. I do not regret that vote, but today, when we are discussing the College of Commissioners which has been presented to us, I cannot hide my disappointment. After completing the hearings of Commissioners-designate, I know there are many people among them who are superbly qualified, but, unfortunately, we also know that among them are people with no experience at all, and who performed awfully during the hearings.

I do realise that in the process of electing the members of the Commission, you have limited room for manoeuvre. I fully support the right of national governments to nominate their candidates, yet despite that,

I do not think the proposed composition of the Commission is optimal. In your speech, you asked if the European Union counts in the world. The best answer to that is the recent decision to call off the European Union-United States Summit. Do you really think this composition of the College will allow the Union to strengthen its position?

Finally, I would also like to express my disappointment that, during the hearings, we did not receive enough answers to questions about the issue of energy security.

Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL). – (DA) Mr President, I would like to start by wishing Mr Barroso luck, because the President of the Commission has genuinely succeeded in putting together a Commission that reflects his political project involving the EU. In my group, however, we completely disagree with this political project. Let me give an example. Workers in many countries have found that the EU is increasingly synonymous with the undermining of the pay and working conditions that they have fought for. We have repeatedly asked the President of the Commission what he will do in concrete terms to ensure that migrant workers can no longer be underpaid, can no longer be discriminated against and can no longer be used as sweatshop labour. The problem is that we have not received a specific answer, neither have we been given any specific answer at the hearings. I therefore draw the conclusion that this Commission accepts social dumping. It is a Commission for which the internal market is more important than safeguarding the interests of the ordinary worker. In one respect, however, there is some hope, since during the meeting with our group, Mr Barroso took great pains to stress how great a supporter he was of equality between the sexes. Words are not sufficient, however. When the first Barroso Commission was appointed in 2004 there were nine female commissioners out of 25. Today Mr Barroso presents a Commission for approval that has only eight women members out of 27. So that has got worse. We can only conclude that in this area, too, Mr Barroso delivers only words, not action. Quite simply, it is not good enough.

Timo Soini (EFD). – (FI) Mr President, in Finland we are commemorating the Winter War. Seventy years ago, the communist Soviet Union attacked tiny Finland. We defended our independence and our right of selfdetermination.

This also continued during the Second World War, which was a terrible ordeal for Europe as a whole. It left us with a strong desire for independence, and a strong desire to decide our own affairs. Helsinki, Moscow and London were the only capital cities that were not occupied in the Second World War. It is for this reason that I want every nation to be able to decide its own affairs freely.

As for the Commission, you certainly have good intentions and there are good people in the Commission, including Olli Rehn, who is Finnish, and who is a moral person with backbone. The peoples of Europe, however – the Finns, the Germans, the British, the Danes – where have they been able to vote for and elect these commissioners? Nowhere. How can they be dismissed? They cannot. The EU is a bureaucracy and not a democracy.

I am in favour of cooperation between independent states. I am Finnish, I am a European, and I love our continent, but that does not mean that I am a supporter of the European Union. Each of us got votes; I got 130 000 votes in Finland. How many votes did the commissioners get and where did they get them? Here they might get 300 votes, but that is about it.

What lies at the heart of democracy? It is national sovereignty. That means that only a people that forms its own nation, independent of all others, has an eternal and unrestricted right always to decide its own affairs. This is a basic principle.

(Applause)

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, we have come to the end of the procedure that precedes the appointment of the commissioners, with hearings that are completely run-of-the-mill. The Commissioners-designate came to tell us that they were deeply attached to the European Union, that they would do their best to learn about issues with which they were unfamiliar, and that they would work hand in hand with Parliament.

None of that is very important or very interesting. Nevertheless, so that Parliament could show its independence, there had to be a scapegoat, an expiatory victim. That victim was Mrs Jeleva, against whom, I might add, there were, in the end, relatively few charges. If this is about conflicts of interest, then the pasts of certain commissioners, who shall remain nameless – the Commissioner for Competition, the Commissioner

for Agriculture, the Commissioner for International Trade – were certainly of far greater concern, and yet they did not present much of a problem to this House.

In reality, Mr Barroso, I pity you somewhat because you are now part of this system of the Treaty of Lisbon – Lisbon being the capital city of your country, a wonderful city and one that deserves better than to lend its name to such a document. You are going to have many people to deal with. From now on, with the Framework Agreement, you are going to have the President of Parliament and the Conference of Presidents, from which the non-attached Members are excluded, in flagrant breach of the provisions of the Rules of Procedure. You are going to have the new – and permanent – President of the Union, whose appointment has not, however, spelt the end of the rotating presidents. You are going to have Baroness Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who was an out-and-out pacifist in her youth when it came to the true Soviet threat, but who we have no doubt will be extremely combative towards Iran.

This will be a difficult policy. There was laughter just now when someone recalled the Marxist past of some of you. In reality, you are still internationalists, but you are no longer by any means proletarians. You have become totally indifferent to the fate of European workers.

(The speaker agreed to take a blue card question under Rule 149(8))

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – Mr President, perhaps I can correct Mr Gollnisch. Is Mr Gollnisch aware that Baroness Ashton was a pacifist not only in her youth but that she was Vice-Chairman of CND at least until 1983, which is something she did not disclose?

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, I am not answering a question about Baroness Ashton's past. I know that, in my country too, 'pacifist' was the name that was actually given to warmongers who were in favour of a communist victory.

Jaime Mayor Oreja (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), I would like to express my wholehearted, firm and unreserved support to Mr Barroso. This is based not only on what he has said today, but also on speeches he has made in Parliament that have encouraged us to support him more strongly and significantly than ever.

I would like to say that the main reason for that support is not the number of Commissioners that our Group, or our political family, has in the Commission, but rather it is fundamentally the belief that this is a unique and distinct time for the European Union. This Commission is not just any Commission and this Parliament is not just any Parliament, not only because of the Treaty of Lisbon, but also because we are experiencing a crisis that is unprecedented in the European Union: an economic and social crisis.

We do not think that the Treaty of Lisbon is the most important thing. The most important thing is for there to be a change of attitude in terms of steering all the European institutions towards greater political ambition. We therefore unreservedly support the Commission led by Mr Barroso. We also support the Commission because, whilst we are currently experiencing an economic and financial crisis, we are going to move onto another phase: the social crisis. The differences between some countries and others are going to increase, and there is going to be increased social unrest. The economic and social crisis is undoubtedly going to cause increased social unrest. Another reason is that we are experiencing a crisis of values, making it essential that all of us, not just the Commission, change our personal attitudes. We all need to change our attitude.

Our Group therefore believes that the best way to change, to transform and to improve is to support the European Commission led by Mr Barroso.

I therefore think that in the context of this task, and of the work that we have to do, the PPE Group is the group that wants us all to change the most. The European Parliament also needs to change. The Commission alone cannot be held responsible for the frequent lack of unity in this House, which is largely the reason why there is no European voice in the world.

Kader Arif (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, trade policy is going to be a major factor in the Union's external policy. Unfortunately, this trade policy is today the symbol of the disappearance of Community interest, since it is nothing other than the addition of national interests.

At a time when we want Europe to defend its values – solidarity, social justice – when we want Europe to be able to integrate into its trade agreements social rights, environmental rights, the protection of human rights and the protection of trade union rights, we realise that the Commission's only proposal to us is to conclude

agreements in which it is felt that there is no alternative to the market and trade and that they are an end in themselves. This, as far as my political family is concerned, is unacceptable.

At a time when we want this trade policy to be able to integrate industrial policy and the effects that it may have on employment policies, we realise that the Commission has given no guarantees on these points in the comments made this morning by the President of the Commission. Unfortunately, however, this does not surprise me. Nothing has been said about the horizontal social clause, about the protection of public services, about the way to see Europe change policy again or have a totally different policy.

To conclude my remarks on these issues, Mr Barroso, I believe that trust is built within a two-way relationship. With your comments this morning, you have not offered us what we need to put our trust in you. Please note that, since you have not provided these guarantees, I cannot guarantee that we will put our trust in you.

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, I finally have the feeling that things are starting to happen. It took more than eight and, indeed, almost nine years for us to get the new treaty and the same number of months for us to get the new Commission. That is not a Europe that takes action, yet action is what we need. People are looking for work, businesses are looking for markets, consumers are looking for reliability, Greece is looking for stability and Europe is looking for its role in the world. It is therefore a good thing that the time of complicated debates that only experts could understand is over and, for that reason, it is also good that the Commission can now work in a way that will really benefit the people once again.

There are two things we want from you, Mr Barroso. Please be courageous and make Europe strong, both inside and out. We want you to be courageous and we also want Europe to be more involved in areas which perhaps differ from those that the Member States or people answering polls want – in the economy and financial affairs, in justice and home affairs, but also in foreign and security policy. This comment is intended for you, in particular, Baroness Ashton. The shortcomings are clear. The internal market is not functioning well enough for small and medium-sized enterprises. This is often due to national, rather than European, bureaucracy.

Greece needs help, of course. For this, we need a strong Europe. I am pleased that the Commission has now put forward a proposal. Anyone who thought that we had already achieved enough in foreign policy will now surely have learnt otherwise in the light of Copenhagen. We therefore repeat: Mr Barroso, make Europe strong, inside and out. You have our support to do so.

Timothy Kirkhope (ECR). – Mr President, our group strongly supports Mr Barroso and his reformist agenda for a Europe that focuses on addressing the real concerns of our fellow citizens and on acting where it can add value to the efforts of our Member States. We therefore believe that he deserved to receive a list of Commission candidates with the talent and ability to help make a reality of his ambitious plans.

But in some of these nominations he has been let down. Nothing can disguise the fact that the experience and competence of the candidates varies greatly, and this was obvious in our hearings. It is unacceptable that the leaders of some Member States still treat the formation of the Commission as an opportunity to reward a colleague for past support, to resolve a local political difficulty or to ease a ministerial friend into a comfortable pre-retirement.

It is clear that some Member States are taking advantage of the fact that we only have a single vote on the whole Commission in order to ease in candidates who might not succeed on their own merits. The single vote must end. We must vote on individual candidates, for only then will all Member States take their responsibility with regard to this process more seriously and send to the Commission the most able candidates available.

Miguel Portas (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, I would like to ask Dr Barroso about the meaning of responsibility in the light of the events which placed the euro under attack from speculators. This afternoon, we shall discuss in more depth the reasons behind this event, but for now, I should like to focus on the statements by Joaquín Almunia because it was these that provoked the immediate increase in international credit market spreads and interest rates for Portugal and Spain, which further weakened the position of the euro itself last week. There is no point in telling me that Joaquín Almunia did not say what he did. Whatever it was that the journalists heard was also what the speculators heard, and they lost no time in acting.

President Barroso, the role of a commissioner is not to pour petrol onto the fire. This House cannot give its approval to someone who, at the critical moment, was not up to the job. That is the first problem, and the second is one of signals. In the light of the attack on the Greek, Spanish and Portuguese public debts, what

have the European institutions done through to now? Mr Trichet has confined himself to saying that no state should be able to rely on special treatment, when the message ought to be the exact opposite: that is, to say to speculators that we shall not be divided, because this is a Europe of solidarity. This is the political question that has arisen and it is for this reason that we expect serious replies given what has happened with the statements by your candidate for commissioner.

Klaus-Heiner Lehne (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to make a brief comment with regard to the interinstitutional agreement and the resolution that we have before us. First of all, I welcome the fact that the Commission now seems to be prepared, in a more realistic way, to accept the indirect right of initiative of the European Parliament. To put it plainly, this means that, in future, there will be specific deadlines within which the Commission will be obliged to respond to our decisions. That is a good thing, also in view of the experiences we had during the last parliamentary term. It is actually self-evident, but this agreement also means that we will be treated on an equal footing with the Council on all matters. That is the logical consequence of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Furthermore, I welcome the fact that we have also succeeded in creating a closer working relationship between Parliament and the Commission in the area of legislative programming. In future, we will have to draw up some sort of common legislative programme for the three institutions, and in this regard, it would be helpful if, as the traditional bearers of the interests of the Union, the Commission and Parliament could come to an agreement, as far as possible, in advance.

I am not completely happy with the results of the impact assessment. In this regard, Parliament will have to consider how it can make qualitative improvements to its own area of the impact assessment in view of the fact that the European Commission does not want to carry out the truly independent impact assessment demanded by Parliament. I welcome the fact that, in this regard, it has already been announced in the statements that there will be close cooperation in connection with the legislation relating to the External Action Service. Here, too, the Commission and Parliament have a largely common interest, which we also ought to define before we talk to the Council.

I also think that it is good – and this is also something that is, in fact, a necessary consequence of the Treaty of Lisbon – that the position of this House in the area of international negotiations in respect of international agreements will be considerably improved and Parliament is to be granted genuine access to all information and to all of the conferences. That has been an absolutely crucial issue, and I am pleased that we have also been able to achieve what we wanted to in this regard.

Evelyne Gebhardt (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, we were very happy to have got the Treaty of Lisbon in place on 1 December and, along with that, a stronger social policy and a strengthening of the position of consumers in the area of internal policy within the European Union. However, we now find that you – contrary to what is contained in the Treaty of Lisbon, namely a horizontal commitment to protect consumers – have done exactly the opposite with the division of the portfolios in your European Commission, because now there is not just one commissioner responsible for consumer protection, but several.

I would like to ask you how you actually intend to handle this. How do you intend to establish coherence in this policy area, an area that is extremely important to consumers, to European citizens? The responsibilities have been divided up. Which commissioner will provide this coherence? Please do not tell us that it is the College that will decide. We need clear areas of responsibility. Please do not say to us, either, that ultimately you will decide in the event of a dispute between the different commissioners. You are not almighty and you belong to a College.

I have serious difficulties with this, Mr Barroso. You need to explain to me how you can truly get to grips with this fragmentation of policy in the area of consumer protection, but also in other areas like foreign policy, so that we have a policy that, after five years, will allow us to say 'yes, it was worth having a Commission like this'. I do not yet know how I will vote later. That will depend very much on your answers to our questions.

Adina-Iona Vălean (ALDE). – Mr President, I think you are more than aware that Europe is standing at a turning point, and you have the opportunity to take it one way or the other: either the gloomy way, with deeper economic crises, a bad competitiveness environment for European companies, more regulation and bureaucratic burden, or the courageous way, seizing all the opportunities laid down in the Lisbon Treaty to make Europe stronger and taking a cohesive approach to global markets and challenges.

Opportunities and solutions to the global challenges can be found in sectors such as the ICT digital agenda, research and development and energy. A new treaty, finally ratified by all Member States, is giving you – on a silver platter – the tools to achieve these goals.

What I fear most is the widening gap between citizens' expectations and Brussels' little world. The trust and confidence that we assume from our citizens is fading away. On how many occasions have I observed the discrepancies between the European administration pursuing a blunt policy goal and peoples' real concerns? What is the aim of devising a common energy policy if we cannot deliver our citizens secure, affordable and green energy? What is the aim of collecting data on energy infrastructures?

I believe we cannot impose one-size-fits-all solutions. The Commission has to take into account the differences, opportunities and means of each Member State. You will need to be visionary and creative to take Europe out of the gloomy past. On this, Parliament will support you. If we miss the opportunity, Europe will not get a second chance in five years.

Lajos Bokros (ECR). – Mr President, Greece is on the verge of fiscal collapse. Spain and Portugal are also struggling with increasing difficulties. If the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Council do not act, then the threat is now the disintegration of the eurozone.

What we can see in this situation is the sub-optimal allocation of portfolios among Commissioners. Joaquín Almunia, who was a safe pair of hands in managing monetary and economic affairs, is now transferred to competition, which is not his cup of tea. Olli Rehn, who was a very distinguished Commissioner for enlargement, is now dealing with economic and monetary affairs, which is not his expertise.

Why is it in the interest of Europe to weaken the intellectual firepower of the Commission precisely in times of crisis?

Werner Langen (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we now have a second Barroso Commission. The way the system has changed has already been mentioned. It is the fourth Commission since I came here. The first two Commissions, led by Mr Santer and Mr Prodi, were both collegial bodies. The first Barroso Commission was notable for its individual players – I am thinking of Mr Dimas, Mrs Kroes or even Mr McGreevy, who remained inactive for years under your leadership. If you now introduce the presidential system, Mr President, then I would recommend that you take the lead, but return to the college system. That is better for Europe and better for cooperation with Parliament.

The citizens have expectations – you spoke of being bold – with regard to the European agenda. Firstly, you need to stabilise the euro, extend the euro area and make the national governments honour their obligations. Secondly, you need to create modern, technology-based jobs to a global standard, because the Lisbon Strategy from 2000 has failed, although the goals were the right ones. Thirdly, you need to continue to develop Europe on the basis of its previous successes, not on the basis of cries of doom and renunciation scenarios, and make Europe an equal partner with the US and China, and, fourthly, you need not only to ask questions about the future, you also need to answer them together with Parliament.

Open markets and more education, growth and prosperity must not be topics that are consigned to the past; they need to remain topics of the future, as must social security, an industrial base and no expansion of the financial markets.

We want fair cooperation with you and the Commission. In this, the Commission must be the engine, not the master of Europe. Two groups have decided to totally oppose you – the Greens and the Communists. They represent barely 13% of Members. If the Commission President and the Commission work well with the rest of this House, then we will, together, have the success that we need.

Alejandro Cercas (S&D). – (ES) Mr President of the Commission, as you are aware, the Members that belong to the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament want a real change in Europe's social agenda and a renewed social agenda.

Many of us cherish the hope that there are some small 'green shoots' in your speech, in the promises that you made to our group, in the speech by Commissioner Andor and in the institutional agreement that we have to submit future European legislation for environmental impact assessment. There is a hope that you have learnt the lessons from the last elections and the resounding silence from workers' organisations regarding the new Commission.

Therefore, Mr Barroso, we are extremely keen for what is currently a somewhat vague promise to become reality, and for the Commission to bring the added value of genuine change. We are extremely keen for Barroso II not to be the same as Barroso I.

Mr President of the Commission, we listened to Commissioner Andor and we have this dream, this hope. We can promise you loyalty if there is a commitment that is going to be upheld regarding everything that you have announced when you have made your appearances and in the agreement that you have made with Parliament.

What we need Mr Barroso – because you are an intelligent man – is for these environmental and social impact assessments to cover the sustainability of the economic model that you advocate. Otherwise, Europe will not have a future. Europe must reconcile its agenda with that of its citizens and workers, otherwise it will not achieve economic integration and it will definitely not achieve political integration, which is our plan. Our plan is to build a Europe with great political ambition that is capable of exciting its citizens once again, of being relevant in the world once again...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Mirosław Piotrowski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioners-designate are proposed by the governments of EU Member States. After they have been approved by the European Parliament, they are free from obligations to their own country. In principle, they are supposed to work for equal development throughout Europe. For this, competence and trust are needed. The first aspect was cast into doubt during the hearings. The candidates' answers were often agreed in advance, and were couched in indecently general terms. Mrs Ashton did touch on some details, but her answers were disappointing. As a whole, the team of Commissioners which showed its prowess at the hearings is weak, and the few well-qualified candidates are not capable of changing this image. However, we are obliged to vote *en bloc* on the whole Commission, and it has not presented a clear strategy of action.

Can we trust the Commission? In the Group of European Conservatives and Reformists, we were asked this question: would we put our own family's budget and the fate of our family in the hands of this Commission? Many of us answered, and still answer today, in the negative.

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, if we were to stick to the version of the facts proposed by Mr Cohn-Bendit, the key to whose interpretation is hypocrisy, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) would have decided to vote in favour because it has thirteen Commissioners, and the Liberals because they have nine, while the Socialists, perhaps, would have to abstain, because their pickings are more scanty.

That is not how things are, however. The votes of so many of us are, in fact, tied to the answer to a more profound question: what role is the Barroso Commission called on to play at this historical juncture?

It is being called upon, Mr President, to restore hope to millions of people and businesses who find themselves in difficulties, and to break their powerlessness in the face of vested interests and governments through dogged determination and with the power of ideas.

It is being called upon, Mr President, to give a European face to immigration and energy policy, and to issue Eurobonds in order to ensure the recovery. It is being called upon, Mr President, to establish with conviction a European foreign and security policy, dear Baroness Ashton, that is worthy of the name.

According to Mr Schulz, you, ladies and gentlemen, are like Trappist monks who have taken the vow of silence. On this, your ideal path of holiness, I suggest you take a different vow: a vow of action. There are, in fact, many things to be done. Mr President, let us do them quickly, let us do them well, let us do them together. My best wishes, President Barroso!

Gianluca Susta (S&D). – (IT) President of the Commission, the progressives among us are giving you a vote of confidence today so as not to leave you open to the blackmail of those who have little faith in this community of Europe and so as not to subordinate you to the governments of the Twenty-Seven.

Believing in a community of Europe means breaking your deafening silence and taking up a central role in the major international issues; defending European interests in the industrial and economic arena; reinforcing social policy and investing more towards conquering world poverty; consolidating our alliance with the United States but on equal terms; reinforcing the position of the European Union in international bodies,

beginning with the UN Security Council; relaunching multilateralism in world trade; and setting the agenda in the fight against global pollution.

Our vote today will be a conditional vote of confidence, with no exceptions, in the Commission and in the individual Commissioners, in order fully to achieve the new Europe born in Lisbon, a political player among the major world powers, and so that it can be, above all, a community of destiny dedicated to its own economic and civil progress, and which sets itself a mission of peace, justice and freedom in the world; one that is not solely a community of memory, living in the present off its own wealth and off a past glory that is now faded.

Alain Lamassoure (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Mr Barroso, the success of the Treaty of Lisbon now depends on you and your team.

Surprisingly, the first permanent President of the European Council decided to disappear after his election. He has succeeded in this. No one outside his country knew anything about him two and a half months ago, and no one has learnt anything more about him since. The Prime Minister of the Spanish Government had the courtesy to come and present to us here Spain's priorities for a six-month term of the Spanish Presidency. That is exactly the opposite of what the authors of the Treaty of Lisbon – many of whom are present in this Chamber – wanted. No one – neither the people of Europe, nor the President of the United States – knows who is in charge of Europe any more.

In a world turned upside down by the crisis, on a continent which has lost all its bearings, which has more than 20 million unemployed, which is at risk of a long-term decline in the face of the emerging powers, Europe needs a pilot, a direction, an ambition, a major unifying project that can mobilise our 27 nations and half a billion free citizens. So, Mr Barroso, do not be scared, be bold! Objectives, strategy, method, financing – it all requires a totally new approach. The prospect of a return to strong growth has never been so distant. Solidarity among the Member States has never been so necessary. The disparity between our competences and our financial resources has never been so great. The citizens' expectations have never been so high. And, without doubt, the European Parliament has never been more willing to support an ambitious policy to make up for the 10 years lost in the interminable institutional debate. As a friend, I say to you: Parliament's support will be proportional not to your prudence but to your boldness.

(Applause)

Dagmar Roth-Behrendt (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, our circumstances are different and we have a different institutional structure. Now that the Treaty of Lisbon is in place, the three institutions – Parliament, the Council and the European Commission – will have to work together in a different way to how they have done up to now. I believe that we all need to be interested in making this a success. Your involvement in the first part of the interinstitutional agreement gives me the impression – and I am not always uncritical of you – that you want this, too.

The first part of this agreement that we have negotiated with you contains important elements for the role of the European Parliament in our cooperation with you, in particular, but also with the Council. These elements are the strengthening of the dialogue between Parliament and the European Commission, the possibility of receiving more information than we have done in the past, in other words, to be able to be an equal partner in the legislative process, and a genuine question time in which commissioners, who are, ultimately, politicians, come here and answer questions and give speeches and responses, without hiding away as they have done in the past. Previously, only you, Mr Barroso, had the courage to do that. Now, all of them will do so. That is a good thing. It will benefit all of us, and it will also be beneficial for European democracy and, hopefully, also for the interest of citizens in what we do, namely our legislative work for everyone.

Finally, Mr Barroso, with regard to the question of legislative initiative, I firmly believe that, with what we were able to achieve in the negotiations with you regarding our cooperation and what we have today shaped into a resolution, we have come as close to the right of initiative for the European Parliament as we possibly can. It furthermore rules out the *sui generis* construct. You worked with us on this and you worked earnestly on it. I respect that and very much appreciate how you have contributed to this.

The impact assessments have already been mentioned by other Members. You have undertaken to make this transparent and to act in a cooperative manner. You said that social impact assessments are important to you. That is an essential point from our perspective. I am completely happy with this. I believe that we should begin the work today, and not before time.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE). – Mr President, I want to refer to the Framework Agreement and a special partnership between the Commission and Parliament, which you addressed and we obviously welcome.

Parliament is fighting for its competence not for the sake of this House's pride and glory. We want to fill the gap of democratic legitimacy after all the pain we witnessed when the referenda were held. We are entering a new era of Community method so please do not defend the competences of the Commission as we, Parliament, were not part of this Community method. I am referring here to the legislative monopoly of the Commission. This monopoly existed when the European Parliament was not what it is today, so I welcome the half-way solution which takes into account our initiatives in legislative matters, and which you have accepted. This House will be looking very closely at the practice of this half-way solution, taking into account our request to the Commission to take legislative action.

My second point is about the common External Action Service. It should draw its credibility from two sources – not only the Council but also the European Parliament – and so far, we are not fully satisfied. I am looking at your Vice-President, Lady Ashton. We deplore the fact that we are absent from the High Level Group. We think we should be involved in the process which was always requested by this House. We should be involved in the nominations of ambassadors and EUSRs. Perhaps there is still some room for left for manoeuvre because it is not for our glory but to give this Service real credibility in the eyes of Europeans. Otherwise, it will be weaker, whereas both sides want it to be stronger.

Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (S&D). – (PT) Mr President, Mr President of the Commission, I was particularly interested in the hearings regarding the Commissioners-designate for agriculture and fisheries, areas which I follow with special attention in the European Parliament. Their background, in both cases, seems to me to be appropriate. However, more than personalities and competences, it is important to know the nature of the political conditions in which they will have to develop their mission. In order for my political group and me to be able, in all good conscience, to vote in favour of the investiture of the Commission, are you, Mr Barroso, in a position to guarantee me that you will give all your support to these two commissioners to ensure that the profound reforms which they will initiate in these most common of policies, agriculture and fisheries, will preserve their Community character and reject any kind of renationalisation?

Paulo Rangel (PPE). – (PT) Mr President, I should like to use this opportunity, principally, to highlight to the Commission and to the President of the Commission the way in which they have worked with this Parliament throughout these months of investiture. There is no other body in the world with executive and legislative initiative powers that is subject to such requirements: its President has to present a programme to Parliament; it has to attend hearings with all parliamentary groups; it is subject to an absolute majority vote; and it must bring all the commissioners here to be heard one by one on their own programmes, followed by three or four hours of direct questions – questions that must be answered.

The Commission agreed to undertake to negotiate a Framework Agreement with Parliament, in which, firstly, it agreed to justify and increase the powers of the Parliament with respect to legislative initiative; secondly, it accepted the principle of complete freedom of access to information whether with respect to legislative and political action or in relation to international negotiations; and, finally, it agreed to take into account Parliament's opinion regarding the commissioners and the reshuffling of the commissioners.

This is definitive proof, in my view, that the Commission has demonstrated since July that it is prepared to have close ties with Parliament and that, by doing so, it has demonstrated in a clear, apparent and unequivocal manner that the strategic alliance within the Lisbon Treaty to promote the Community method, of which Mr Saryusz-Wolski spoke, is the alliance between Parliament and the Commission. For these reasons, both the Commission and the Framework Agreement deserve the complete support of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats).

Othmar Karas (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in a democracy, an approval is never a *carte blanche*, it is always a credit of trust that first needs to be justified. Let us therefore open up a new chapter together, let us not merely carry on as before, as you, President of the Commission, have said. The treaty, the crisis and globalisation make it necessary for all of us to change the way we operate. We need greater European awareness in the Member States, more honesty towards the European Union, more EU in Europe and more EU in the world. It requires leadership from every single commissioner and the readiness to turn European Union debates into policy.

The European Parliament and the Commission must enter into a new partnership – a partnership for a Europe of the citizens, a partnership to counter nationalism, protectionism and extremism, dishonesty, dumbing down, irresponsibility and a lack of respect. In addition to the stability pact for currency, we need a

sustainability pact for all policy areas in order to be more credible and to regain lost trust. It will be necessary to develop the excessive deficit procedure, the exit strategy and Europe 2020 into one joint concept to bring down national debt, deal with deficits, promote innovation and growth and create long-term jobs.

Finally, Mr President, I urge you to draw up an opening balance sheet and submit proposals for coordinating economic, social, fiscal, research, innovation and education policy, because we need more Europe.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE). – Mr President, the main challenge for this Commission will not be to fight the crisis we have seen. We are gradually coming out of it and, although it will still be an important task to fulfil the policies that we have decided, the main challenge must be to prepare the ground for the future economy of Europe, to ensure that it will be a dynamic economy able to compete and play a leading part in the world economy.

That requires policies for new jobs, investments and dynamic economic growth. Otherwise, we will continue to face the problems caused by the crisis – the unemployment and the deficits. It is important that the Commission that will be approved here in Parliament today takes this challenge seriously.

European voters gave a very clear message in June. They do not want the Socialist regulation-based model but a model based on being open, laying the ground for a level playing field and a social Europe, meaning jobs, growth, opportunities and cross-border integration. That is the task of this new Commission – laying the ground for the economy, prosperity and social security by being open-minded and by saying ‘yes’ to innovations.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Mr President, the European Community is more than 50 years old now. Some people speak about it undergoing a mid-life crisis – feeling a bit tired, morally worn out, hesitant about further enlargement.

Against this background, Mr Barroso, you have an historic opportunity for statesmanship, real reforms and long-term vision. Your second term coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration. The only solution for the founding fathers of Europe was not political bickering, but rising above national interests to establish supranational European policies based on an open and generous attitude, as you yourself mentioned.

First of all, we expect real implementation of common European policies, especially the completion of the common energy market. The European Commission has been the European Parliament's main ally and collaborator. We wish you and the whole College of Commissioners well.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) I believe that the main task of the new Commission is to implement the Treaty of Lisbon. It is your job to demonstrate to the citizens of Europe that the new treaty meets their expectations and to instil confidence in them about it.

In the next few years, among the many other important matters it will deal with, the Commission must put forward two vitally important policies for review: the common agricultural policy and the cohesion policy. I think that the budget policy for the 2014-2021 period can only be devised and structured after these policies have been finalised. This is the reason that the new Commission's framework programme must make this an absolute priority. I hope that the review of these two European policies will help, in the medium and long term, to balance the economic, financial and social situation in all Member States in order to prevent imbalances of the type which are being seen at the moment and are jeopardising the sustainable development of the European Union as a whole.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) The new Member States are rightly worried that national egoism and renationalisation is gaining strength within the European Union. The European Union cannot exist without solidarity, cohesion or catching up by the less developed new Member States. The 2020 programme will need to be shaped by the Commission led by Mr Barroso in such a way that we do not reduce, but preserve – while reforming – and strengthen the Community policies we have hitherto pursued, in particular, the cohesion and regional policy and the common agricultural policy. We are seeing frightening intentions whereby some are trying to phase out these policies and, in particular, to reduce the common agricultural budget. The Council should work out concrete measures in order that the world crisis may not become an employment and social crisis. Finally, we must not allow the tragic Greek situation to lead to the conclusion that we should not continue to strengthen the euro area and should not continue expansion towards the Western Balkans.

Lena Ek (ALDE). – Mr President, Albert Einstein said that life is like riding a bicycle: to keep your balance, you must keep moving. That is exactly what we expect from the new Commission. At the same time, there are worries. The issue of climate change, for example, is split between a number of portfolios; that is most worrying. The issues of industrial policy and energy policy, meanwhile, will be dealt with by Commissioners from just one political group; that is also most worrying. What we need now is balance and support for sustainable economic growth, and it is important that this is reflected in the EU 2020 strategy.

The first words in a novel are always the most difficult to write. The impression the Commission creates and the way it will operate will be reflected and written into the EU 2020 strategy, and this will be an indication of the work and quality of the new Commission. I hope it will be sustainable.

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen of the new College, ladies and gentlemen here in plenary and in the gallery, in these times of economic, financial and climate crisis, the citizens of Europe expect leadership from you. They expect bold and clear projects. Mr Barroso, you said a couple of times today that we cannot go on as if it is business as usual and we need to be bold and courageous. This is not something that we have seen in your guidelines or in the hearings of most of the commissioners.

Take foreign policy, for example. Baroness Ashton, you are the one who should and must be the united voice of Europe. It is not only a matter of good coordination or consulting the Member States. You should present bold, specific projects to the Council, for example, for European civil disaster prevention in line with the Barnier report. You need to lead the way, including in matters relating to the financial crisis. We need common financial market supervision and a financial transactions tax.

Present these proposals to the Council. Please do this and do not wait for the Council to say 'yes' or 'no' or for individual Member States to start lobbying you. If we get this leadership from you, then you will also receive the support of the European Parliament. You do not have it yet.

John Bufton (EFD). – Mr President, I must raise what I believe is a very important issue in relation to the United Kingdom.

Currently in the UK, we enjoy an opt-out from the 48-hour working week. However, after listening to Mr Andor at the hearings – I have nothing against Mr Andor personally – I am very concerned about the direction in which I believe he will take us. It is quite likely, in my view, that the UK will lose the opt-out. If we do, three million people in our country are going to lose out on this. They enjoy working extra hours. Our retained fire service in the UK – in particular in my region, Wales, where 75% of it is covered by retained officers – is under threat.

We have a general election coming soon, and I call upon all the British MEPs present today to vote against the new Commission on the basis that, if this 48-hour working opt-out is lost for the good people of my country, it will cause us grave consequences. It is up to them. The three million people will be watching how they vote, as I will.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, the Treaty of Lisbon is intended to strengthen the European Union and with that, naturally, primarily the European Commission and also our Parliament. It is disgraceful, however, that, despite this, politically weak representatives are placed at the top of the EU institutions. Political observers agree that the new Commission contains no real political heavyweights. If the President of the Commission is already the smallest common denominator among the powers of the large EU States, this situation is clearly continuing unchecked with the individual commissioners. The new President-in-Office of the Council and the High Representative, in particular, are also more like political lightweights. Our important political partners like the US are already letting us know this, and we do not know what will happen with other partners like Russia, for example.

As a result, the question arises as to whether a strengthened European Parliament in cooperation with a weak Commission can actually do any positive work in terms of integration and satisfying the interests of the European peoples.

Paul Rübig (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, my request to the new Commission is that it do more for small and medium-sized enterprises. Two thirds of our workers work for these enterprises and they generate 50% of gross domestic product. We must, above all, see to it that the creditworthiness of the small and medium-sized enterprises is increased, because, particularly in times of crisis, venture capital is of particular interest in order to be able to continue to pay good wages. We need to be more competitive and for this we need to provide better support for the infrastructure. The trans-European networks in particular ought to be improved.

We must see to it that the small and medium-sized enterprises also have research opportunities so that they are able to offer new products and services via the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. We also need to improve vocational education and training. That is a major task for the European Commission. I wish the new European Commission every success and good luck for the future.

Milan Zver (PPE). – (SL) I am with those who believe that today is a great day for European democracy, not only because we will be bringing to completion new European institutions and structures, but also because we will be adopting this interinstitutional agreement which, together with the Treaty of Lisbon, actually increases the influence that European citizens can bring to bear on European politics.

To me, that seems particularly relevant right now, as we have already witnessed, or can begin to see, the signs of the first crisis of European democracy. It is evidenced by ever-shrinking election turnouts, people's ever-dwindling confidence in fundamental democratic institutions and the fact that, in some European capitals, demonstrators are greeted with violence and, in others, the symbols of totalitarianism and similar regimes are being commemorated.

In brief, I think it is high time that European politics also did something to develop democracy at the level of institution building, but that will not be enough. We also need to make an effort to raise the level of democratic political culture, especially in post-communist countries.

Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, the members of the Spanish delegation of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament are going to vote in favour of the mandate of the Commission that has been christened Barroso II. We have good reasons for doing so. One of them is that we are convinced that not even Mr Barroso could agree with the critics of Barroso I when he has a mandate for the Barroso II Commission.

Anyone can see what the reasons are. Europe has changed, the world has changed, and it has entered a crisis. A globalised world, facing a global crisis, which needs a globally relevant Europe. Instead of responding to the crisis with further crises, we must take action, and we must do it now. We need to take action to respond to climate change, new energy sources, the importance of our foreign policy on the global scale and our contribution to a safer world in the fight against crime and terrorism. We need to take this action now.

Six months have now passed since the elections, and it is now time for us to have a Commission that is at full capacity and is fully operational. That is what the 500 million Europeans who are watching us are expecting right now. We are therefore convinced that as inaction is not an option, the only option is for Barroso II to surprise the critics of Barroso I with action, with firm action.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) I, too, would like to say that today is an important day as we will be voting for a Commission not only for 27 Member States, but also for a single Europe. It has been stated in this Chamber that the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon is a matter of urgency. It is an urgent matter overshadowed by a major difficulty because the current crisis is far from conducive to the implementation of this treaty, which must produce a single Europe for 27 countries and a Europe which, at the same time, every European finds credible.

I would like to stress that, in my view, the biggest challenge facing the European Union is actually the sense of solidarity between Europeans from the old countries and new countries, in other words, the solidarity between Europeans from East and West. This is the only way we can make Europe credible for those aspiring, sooner or later, to join our Union, regardless of whether it is the Western Balkans, Moldova, Turkey or Iceland.

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D). – (FI) Mr President, it has definitely taken too long to form the Commission. Future historians will surely wonder how it was possible to spend six months putting together the Commission, while in Europe, we were going through the deepest recession in Europe's economic history.

I believe that this process has, on the whole, empowered and strengthened the Commission and Parliament. That is why I am surprised at the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, who have unanimously decided to vote against the new Commission, especially as they themselves have frequently stated that they gained a lot from the process and that their objectives were accepted. Frankly, I think this is a case of extreme populism.

The viability of the internal market and a social Europe are like brother and sister: they go hand in hand. It is very important that an assessment of the social impact is a step in the direction of a social Europe.

Eva Lichtenberger (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr Barroso, Mr President, I am disappointed not only about the people in the Commission, but also about your allocation of portfolios. You have split up some of them in such a way that it will, in future, be very difficult to conduct specific negotiations in the committees. Moreover, you have taken away from some commissioners a portfolio with which they had actually proved their worth and you have given them one they are not so happy with. Looking at this from more of a psychological point of view, an unhappy commissioner, Mr Barroso, can do a lot of harm, because, particularly at the start of his job, he will be faced with a lot of people putting forward suggestions that he is not able to deal with. In my opinion, that is a wrong decision.

The second point I would like to make is about the interinstitutional agreement. We will definitely fight for this to be implemented, as the Treaty of Lisbon is now in force. We will have our say on international treaties and we will succeed in this, even in the face of delaying tactics by both the Council and the Commission. The Commission should be prepared for this.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the European Union is in a completely new situation. The Treaty of Lisbon has introduced important changes. What can we say after two months of its function? Well, in fact, if we think about it more deeply, it is only a good and important beginning. Only now has the time come to give those provisions and resolutions real content. We should make an appropriate division of competences between institutions or newly created important high positions, and establish political principles and rules for cooperation. We also need to maintain the principle of real equality between Member States, but also between Member States and the Union. It is important not to reduce the significance of the Presidency held by individual Member States.

Only a cohesive Union, one which speaks with unanimity, will have the position in the world which it deserves. The initial experience gained over the past two months gives rise to a variety of doubts. These problems, therefore, should be given profound thought, and measures should be taken which will enable us to achieve the expected effects and a new quality of operation of the European Union.

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) The question, once asked by Kissinger, is often repeated – who will pick up the phone? The point being that we need strong personalities and strong faces. No! We need strong institutions. We need a Council, a Parliament, a Union in which anyone can pick up the phone at the Council, because he or she is able to give a competent answer and a competent solution. I would like now to make such a phone request: we would like a Europe in which the rights of the traditional national minorities are also respected, where there are no Slovak language laws. With the entry into force of that language law, not only are the fundamental rights of the EU and the provisions of the European human rights conventions infringed, but one of the greatest achievements of European integration, the functioning of a unified internal market, is also in danger. I request that the Commission take the necessary steps, in accordance with the opinion of the Legal Service, to ensure that Community law continues unflinchingly to prevail.

Derek Vaughan (S&D). – Mr President, structural funds have been so important for regions like Wales in the past and currently. They have helped many individuals, communities and businesses. They have been particularly important during recent difficult economic times.

Therefore, it is vital that all these groups can benefit from structural funds in the future. I believe a structural fund should be available to all regions across Europe if they qualify post-2013. I think we should rule out the renationalisation of structural funds and I particularly welcomed the comments from the Commissioner-designate for the Budget and Financial Programming, who stated his opposition to the renationalisation of cohesion policy and structural funds.

I also think it is vital that funding does not suddenly stop in 2013 for all the groups I mentioned. Therefore, I believe that it is important that transitional status is made available for regions which fall out of convergence post-2013. I would hope the Commission gives cohesion policy and structural funds the priority it deserves in the coming weeks and months.

Gay Mitchell (PPE). – Mr President, I want to raise an issue here that I have been raising in my own country in the hope that, by raising it from the top down and the bottom up, we might somehow get some action on it.

We are constantly talking about the banking crisis and what we can do for small and medium-sized enterprises. The problem is that there are many small and medium-sized enterprises that simply cannot get loans, even though they have viable businesses and can give employment. The biggest reason for that, in my experience, is the absence of bank managers. We got into this crisis because the banking system was on automatic – and,

in many cases, it is still on automatic. The European Central Bank and the European Commission have given a lot of support to the financial institutions. It is time now that we returned, and used every influence we have to return, to the traditional bank manager, who can make calculated risk based on character, ability and track record.

I really think that would make a difference, and I say this to the 27 Commissioners here present: do not underestimate your ability to influence...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Jörg Leichtfried (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, I would like to mention two things that, for me, are absolutely crucial. A great deal has been said today about overcoming the crisis. In this regard, we must be aware of one thing: this crisis will not be overcome if bonuses are paid out again once the banks are stable again. This crisis will only be overcome when those who have now become unemployed get their jobs back again, and when those who, as yet, have not had any work are able to work. Then we will have overcome the crisis.

It is therefore vital for your Commission that you pursue the goal of creating and safeguarding jobs and ensuring that those who work hard also receive adequate pay for their work and have a greater share of the general prosperity than was previously the case. If you succeed in doing that, Mr Barroso, then, in my opinion, the future Commission will be more successful than the previous one.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, like the election of a Pope, I hope we will be able to say this evening ‘*Habemus Papam; habemus Commission*’, but one area that concerns me and a lot of people is that in the Lisbon Treaty, we were to appoint a President of the Council to give clarity. I am not sure whether the clarity is there, and maybe President Barroso could answer that for us.

When push comes to shove, at a time of crisis, who is going to be the one voice representing Europe? Is it going to be Mr Van Rompuy? Is it going to be Baroness Ashton? Is it going to be one of the Commissioners? Is it going to be the rotating Presidency, or is it going to be President Barroso himself? I would like an answer to that.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission. – Mr President, I will try to start by answering some concrete questions and will then address the more general ones.

Firstly, on the euro area, some Members of this Parliament raised issues relating to the euro area and some current problems we are facing in euro area Member States. First of all, let me recall that the euro is one of the major successes in Europe’s history. Since its creation with 11 participants, the euro area has grown to comprise 16 Member States. The euro area has been an area of stability and job creation. Of course, it was affected by the crisis. Non-euro area countries were also affected by the crisis. I do not need to remind you that, just a few days ago, I received the Prime Minister of Iceland, a country very close to us – and a non-euro area member – which was indeed facing this crisis. I want to repeat that this crisis was not created in the euro area; it came from outside the euro area.

But the truth is that the euro did protect the countries which share the single currency. I believe that the European situation would be much more difficult today if we did not have the euro. We have yet to reap the full benefits of the euro. To do so, we need to reinforce economic coordination in the euro area. It is true that we do not have just a monetary union. We should have a real economic union. The treaty gives new opportunities, which I intend to make use of. Olli Rehn, the new Commissioner for these matters – if we get your support – will develop this line.

Looking ahead at how to reinforce the euro area is very important, but of course, it does not prevent us from looking at the present. The period the euro area is going through is a difficult one. There is no point in denying it. Other countries outside the euro area are also facing very difficult times. Let us also recognise that. However, I must say that the situation in the financial markets is sometimes reported in a way that amplifies the problems, and does not always give an objective assessment of the situation. Such analyses usually come from non-euro area countries.

But the euro area has the capacity to deal with the difficulties currently affecting it. We have our system of fiscal rules, the Stability and Growth Pact, which must be properly implemented. In the case of Greece, we have the capacity to assess and monitor its fiscal adjustment programme. We have the possibility of recommending bold structural reforms in Greece which will also be closely monitored by the Commission.

On 3 February, the Commission adopted a package on Greece which will go to the Council early next week. Naturally, the solution requires, above all, action from the Greek side. Support for the determination of the Greek authorities will increase confidence in the successful achievement of the ambitious programme they have adopted.

Member States, particularly those in the euro area, should always have in mind that the economic policies of each of them have an impact on the economies of others. I welcome clear indications that all Member States are aware of the challenge and will act accordingly.

There was a concrete question asked about consumer policy, I think by Mrs Gebhardt. There is a person with clear responsibility for consumer policy in the Commission, namely Commissioner Dalli. He will be in charge of this policy, propose initiatives in this area and discuss them with you in the IMCO Committee and in plenary. Specific civil-law dimensions will be under the responsibility of the Commissioner for Justice, Vice-President Reding. This is normal in most executives around Europe, where those specific issues are dealt with by the Minister of Justice.

Of course, all decisions on new initiatives will have to be approved by the College. I am extremely committed to collegiality. In fact, many of you have urged the Commission to keep a strong accent on collegiality. Under the treaties, the President of the Commission is the guarantor of collegiality. In today's policies, this is a normal tendency. More and more issues are transversal or horizontal by nature. They need a common purpose and they require the integration of different sectoral policies.

What happens in the Commission is more or less the same as what is happening in national governance and in global governance. We see now that, very often, Heads of State or Government need to address, in a coordinated and coherent way, matters that were previously dealt with separately by those responsible in the different governments.

So this is exactly what we intend to do. I want to underline this point with special pride because we are now building this new Commission on the experience of the previous one. The previous one was the first Commission of this enlarged Europe – the first time we had a Commission with 27 members from 27 different countries. The fact that that Commission worked in a truly collegiate spirit with a sense of purpose is indeed a demonstration that the enlarged European Union can work with 27 or more Members. I think this is also critically important for the future.

There were some concrete questions about cohesion policy and some Community policies like fisheries and agriculture – for example, the question by Mr Capoulas Santos. The cohesion policy has been enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon. By its nature, it is a European policy. We need to see how we can continue the process of reform so that we can continue to improve the policy's value for money and ensure that cohesion policy and regional policy are translated into a real increase in the competitiveness of all the regions of Europe. We need to be sure that the policy can achieve that so that we can have a strong case in the next financing debate. Let me assure you of my full commitment – and, I think I can say, the full commitment of the new Commission – to the principles of social, economic and territorial cohesion that are also enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Of course, we will do everything we can to promote the common policies of Europe.

There were some concrete questions about social impact assessment – Mr Cercas's question. I want to make clear what I have said publicly before. We are committed to introducing this social impact assessment in our work through the Impact Assessment Board. We believe we have made a lot of progress on impact assessment. We are always ready to improve that work and we believe the social dimension should be properly addressed in our work.

Some Members of this Parliament put questions to me regarding energy security. I want to underline that we are going to include energy security in our proposal for the European Union 2020 strategy. One of the innovations of the European Union 2020 strategy is precisely to bring together some policies that were previously treated separately. I believe that promoting energy security and energy efficiency should be an important part of our agenda for competitiveness and for greener, sustainable and resource-efficient growth in Europe. This underlines how important we believe this agenda is.

Some of you asked me about SMEs and the value of the internal market – Mr Hökmark and others. It is very important to relaunch the internal market now. It is important to make clear that the internal market is not just about a market, even if markets are important.

Some people believe that we defend markets because we are market fundamentalists. Nothing could be further from the truth. We believe the internal market is, above all, the basis for the European project. Without

an internal market, we will not have a strong European Union. If you allow the internal market to be fragmented, we will see the ugly face of economic nationalism again in Europe. We have to speak courageously and say that the internal market exists to defend the weakest – the consumers, to defend small and medium-sized companies against monopolies, and, of course, to defend the European project as a whole. That is why I asked Mr Monti to produce a report so that we can bring some new ideas and also create a larger consensus to relaunch and deepen the internal market as one of the great past and future achievements of our European project.

(FR) I would like now to mention one or two more general issues that some of you have raised. Mr Daul, Mr Schulz, Mr Lamassoure – who gave a speech in which he stressed the importance of boldness – Mr López Aguilar, Mr Mayor Oneja and many others have raised the issue of ambition. This is, in my view, an extremely important point, and we must have an honest debate on it.

Some of you, and particularly Mr Schulz, have questioned me once again on the issue of the market and of social policy. I would say to you once again: it is not the Commission that you have to convince of the need to have a social purpose. You will have to work with us to try to convince certain capitals, because the truth is very clear: some capitals believe that Europe is solely about the market and that, under the principle of solidarity, they are responsible for social policy. I disagree. I believe that, in order to also have an emotional attachment to Europe, we need a social dimension. We need a social dimension that actually combines what can be done at European level with what can be done at national level. No one wants to create a European social security system or a centralised health system in Europe. That is not what we are proposing.

Moreover, this should not be seen in terms of competition between the national level and the European level. However, if, in addition to our work on the internal market, on competition, on State aid policy and on other policies, such as external trade policy, there is no social dimension in Europe, we will have difficulty in ensuring the legitimacy of the European project.

I would therefore stress this point: we are not the ones who have to be convinced of the need for a social dimension. Work with us to strengthen Europe's social dimension – the social market economy – which is, moreover, enshrined as an objective in the Treaty of Lisbon. I am very committed to this, and we must strive to achieve it together. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

(Applause)

As regards the matter of governance – a favourite issue of Mr Verhofstadt's and also of mine – once again, help us, support us. I am in favour of enhanced governance of Europe, and Europe needs this enhanced governance. My speech – you will call it a speech, it is a speech, but it is, all the same, a speech that I am making on behalf of the new College and which reflects a political ambition, a political stance – is clear. We are living in unprecedented times. As I said, both within and outside Europe, we need more determination with regard to European matters. I am absolutely convinced, intellectually and politically, that, if Europe does not act in a concerted manner, we risk having only an insignificant role at international level in the future. I said this in my guidelines, before the Heads of State or Government, and I am going to repeat it at the informal European Council, the day after tomorrow, because I am convinced of it.

I believe that recent developments have only served to highlight this situation more acutely. The international financial crisis has shown just how interdependent our economies are. The problems being experienced by the euro area right now also show how interdependent our economies are. We must therefore step up our efforts in terms of European coordination and governance. Brussels need not necessarily be given national competences: this is a 20th century debate and one which I believe has had its day. It is wrong to make this an 'it is for Brussels, it is for the Commission, it is against the Member States ...' kind of debate, because it is ridiculous.

It is clear that, while we want to have a role in the world today, our Member States alone do not have the influence required to negotiate on equal terms with the United States, Russia or China. We therefore need this dimension, not to strengthen Brussels, but to strengthen Europe and, above all, to focus on the real interests of each of our fellow citizens. It is here that we must work together, and here too, I say to you: support us. We need your support, not in a course that will inevitably lead to war between the institutions – now more than ever we need the institutional partnership – but to defend Europe's interests in the world.

Lastly, in terms of external relations, here too let us be absolutely clear. Where in the world does Europe count? Europe counts in the world where it has, in fact, a coordinated position. It is respected in trade terms, I can assure you of that. Our competition laws are respected by all the major international conglomerates.

We have a common policy. We have institutions. We have the basis on which to act. Bear in mind, though, that we are living at a time, particularly in international security terms, when Europe does not have the geopolitical and defence instruments that others have. I can see very clearly, when I speak with some of our international partners, that they think above all in terms of security. They think in terms of strategic balance. And here, it must be said clearly, Europe cannot be naive.

The problem in Copenhagen was not a lack of ambition from Europe, as some are saying. On the contrary, we were by far the most ambitious. For me, what Copenhagen showed was that we had to express a European interest in the various areas and defend it consistently and strategically, with all our partners. Therefore, we must not simply conduct a generous policy, important though it is; we must also have the strength to defend our generosity and the conviction to defend our interests. That is what I intend to do, and I also hope to have your support in this regard.

Finally, some Members – Mr Lehne and Mr Swoboda, Mrs Roth-Behrendt, Mrs Wallis and Mr Rangel, among others – spoke at length about the institutional question, and, in particular, about the Framework Agreement. I wish to say to you that what I did in the negotiations with you was precisely to convey the spirit and the letter of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Some people have not yet realised that the European Parliament has powers today that it did not have prior to the Treaty of Lisbon. I believe in the European dimension of the parliamentarian, and when I use the word ‘dimension’ – my English is not as good as yours, Mrs Wallis – it is not to say something vague. For me, ‘dimension’ means depth, it means scope. It is something very ambitious, in any case.

I wish to work with Parliament in this spirit. Not against another institution, because I believe – and I must say it here – that we need a very strong Council and European Council. I welcome the innovations in the Treaty of Lisbon, not least the existence of a permanent Presidency of the European Council, because this provides continuity and consistency in the long term.

I very much welcome the creation of the role of High Representative, who is, at the same time, Vice-President of the European Commission. This is not about making things more difficult, quite the opposite! Instead of having two centres for external relations, one on the Council side, and one on the Commission side, we now have one key figure – in this case, Baroness Ashton – who is going to defend the European interest with intergovernmental legitimacy, which remains very important in external matters, but also with European legitimacy.

Therefore, I say this with a great deal of conviction. I believe that it would be a mistake to start a debate or an institutional conflict now. We need the various institutions. Some people felt compelled to ask the eternal question about Mr Kissinger and the telephone number. I have already said it once: Mr Kissinger was the Secretary of State. I believe that, from now on, the US Secretary of State's opposite number will be Baroness Ashton. She has the responsibility and the ability to play that role.

However, at Heads of State or Government level, apart from the relationships with our Member States, we have, in the Treaty of Lisbon, the President of the Council, who represents Europe in external policy and common security matters, and the Commission which, pursuant to Article 17, represents Europe in every other aspect of external relations. That is our system.

Some people would like a completely unified system. As some have said, the United States, at times, does not have a completely unified system either. At times, we negotiate with the US Administration and we subsequently discover that Congress does not follow exactly the same line as the US Administration.

It is also important to understand here that we consist of 27 Member States. We have a system that is an improvement on the internal system. Instead of having a Presidency that changes every six months, we have a permanent Presidency of the Council. We now have the High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission. This is a step forward, true, but dynamism is more important than mechanism, and it is in this way that we must add a new dimension to our action.

I shall conclude by making an appeal to this House. With power comes responsibility. I am going to be very frank with you here, ladies and gentlemen: the European Parliament has gained a large number of powers with this revision. I hope that these powers will be used not only for feel-good policies, but also as part of the responsibility of governing Europe with the other institutions. This is a big test of the responsibility of all the institutions – of the European Parliament, of the Commission and of the European Council.

Some of you asked me – sincerely, I believe – to show more boldness. I can tell you that I am ready to make efforts along those lines. However, the Commission alone will be unable to see them through. Let us be clear on this point. It would be an illusion, and the Commission cannot establish its influence, its power, its direction against the will of our Member States, which are democratic States.

We must establish these things together, with a parliamentary assembly – in this case, a European Parliament – which genuinely assumes its responsibility, which is not simply, as some people want, a place in which to protest. Moreover, I have noticed that some people speak louder because they are weaker! What we need, therefore, is for all the European political groups that are in power to work together.

Some political groups said that they would vote against us. When it comes to the extremes, I can tell you that I would be worried if they did vote for us. I do not need that kind of support. The Commission does not want their support. However, the Commission wants and requests the support of all the European forces. That, I do ask of you. I ask for it modestly, but also with the firm belief that we need your support and that you can help us to fill the gap that exists today.

What is the real problem? Let us be clear on this subject too. When we talk about it with our fellow citizens, there is, today, in Europe – and this will be my final point, Mr President – a fundamental gap between our stated ambitions and the results that we manage to obtain.

Some now wish to use this gap as a means of lowering our ambitions. Others – and we are in this camp – want to improve our results so that they match our ambitions. I am counting on this House to fulfil our ambition, an ambition for a stronger Europe, in an increasingly demanding world.

I ask you to give your support to the new Commission so that, with our ambition, we can turn the European dream into a reality.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you, Mr Barroso, for giving detailed answers to the questions and remarks which were put to you from the Chamber, and also for your very comprehensive treatment of our mutual relations – the European Commission and the European Parliament. We are aware of the responsibility which rests on the European Parliament. Our agreement is of a new kind, and we are moving closer with our cooperation than we have done before. Our joint responsibility, of two Community institutions – the European Parliament and the European Commission – is particularly significant. Thank you, too, for presenting your vision of the European Commission's work and the aims of that work. I would like to thank once again Mr López Garrido, who is representing the Spanish Presidency, and the entire Spanish delegation, for being here in the Chamber during our proceedings and debate.

I have received five motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 106(4) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 9 February 2010.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Carlo Casini (PPE), in writing. – (IT) I should like to say how pleased I am, as Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, about the agreement that has been reached on the principal lines of a new Framework Agreement between the Commission and Parliament.

I must, however, make it clear that we need to think more deeply about the nature of the relationship between these two institutions. The outlook for democratic growth in the Union continues to be one in which Parliament is seen as representing the people and the Council as a sort of second chamber, representing the States. In such a context, the Commission should be considered as a government, and it is clear that this configuration would require rules that are considerably more detailed than the adjustments deservedly outlined today.

I should like to add a thought on the citizens' right of initiative. The relevant rules will have to be tailored to the effects that we consider must follow as a result. These effects must be considered in comparison with those stemming from the existing right of every citizen to submit a petition to the European Parliament and

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes

those connected to the limited powers of Parliament. Parliament has no power of initiative but it does have the power to request that the Commission initiate legislation.

Edite Estrela (S&D), in writing. – (PT) Now that the institutional problem has been resolved, with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the election of the new Commission, a new stage in the history of the Union is beginning. A new era which aims to be ambitious in its capacity for initiative and in its foresight with respect to the great challenges of our time. A new era in which the Commission will work in complete harmony with Parliament in the search for solutions to the problems which affect European citizens, as envisaged in the interinstitutional agreement. A new era of European leadership in relation to the major issues of the contemporary world and of appropriate responses to the challenges of the future. A new era in the integration of a fairer Europe which shows greater solidarity.

The new College of Commissioners, on the basis of the evidence given during the hearings, meets the necessary criteria to respond to present needs. It is a Commission of balance, which combines the experience of its veterans with the freshness of the other half of its members. And it is also balanced in terms of its representation of the genders, given that one third of its members are female, a small increase in comparison to before. The balance of power between the three institutions does not weaken anyone but rather strengthens Europe.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) In presenting the new European Commission, President Barroso has presented a programme which is the continuation of the neoliberal, federalist and militaristic policy of the old Commission. The College of Commissioners which he has presented will continue along the same lines, as we saw confirmed during the hearings that took place in the parliamentary committees. We are going to have a period of proposals for the deepening of the European capitalist integration that we are experiencing right now.

The previous Commission left a considerable amount of work prepared, including the general outline and what is termed the public consultation over the strategy which will give continuity to the so-called Lisbon Strategy. For now, they are calling it the EU 2020 strategy, but they have already said that it is, in fact, about 'making it happen: harnessing existing instruments in a new approach'. Put another way, what we know right now is that we are going to have more of the same.

They ignore the need to weigh up how far the measures adopted in the name of the Lisbon Strategy have been implemented and to what degree the objectives proclaimed at that time have been achieved or what the consequences have been of the application of the Stability Pact. They hide the fact that we have more than 23 million unemployed people in the EU as a whole, with younger people being particularly afflicted as their unemployment rate now exceeds 21%, as well as over 85 million people in poverty. We cannot but vote against this new Commission.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, the European Commission, which is headed by Mr Barroso, has, today, achieved greater support than in 2004. However, in the debate which preceded the vote, many reservations were expressed, concerning both the Commission's composition and the unclear division of competences in the framework of the new College. For example, consumer protection is part of the portfolio of as many as six different Commissioners. At the moment, it is difficult to imagine how, in practice, those shared competences will influence the effectiveness of the work of the respective Commissioners. The European Commission, which was elected today, 9 February 2010, is going to have to start work quickly, because since around October last year, when the election of the new Commission was supposed to happen, the old Commission has only been holding the fort, and has not taken any new initiatives. Keeping to the framework understanding on contacts with Parliament will be a test for the new Commission, especially the principle of equal treatment for Parliament and the Council.

I would also like to point out that during the term of office of the present Commission, the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making of 2003 will be reviewed. As rapporteur for the Committee on Legal Affairs, I am currently working on this, and I hope that constructive cooperation with the new Commission will bring substantial results in this area.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The new College of Commissioners is the first complete European Union team made up of 27 Member States. Romania and Bulgaria, which joined the European Union on 1 January 2007, only now have the opportunity to propose a commissioner for an entire five-year term.

I congratulate Romania for choosing Mr Cioloş. I think that his performance during the hearings which took place before the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development made a deep impression on all those who attended. I also believe that his professionalism bodes well if we think about the major challenges which await us in the area which he is going to manage. I am primarily referring to the forthcoming debates on the future of the common agricultural policy.

In order to find the most suitable solutions, adapted to the needs and interests of all Member States, the new commissioner will need to have a deep understanding of European agriculture, a strong work rate and plenty of diplomacy, all qualities which I know that he possesses. I wish the entire College of Commissioners every success and I hope that the work it is going to carry out in its future mandate will succeed in bringing the European Union closer to its citizens.

Rafał Kazimierz Trzaskowski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) I congratulate Mr Barroso and the entire College of Commissioners but, at the same time, I hope we are now going to have a more independent and dynamic Commission. A Commission which will guard, above all, the common interest, and which will undertake bold reforms of EU policies, which we have to embark upon after the years spent reforming our institutions. In terms of relations between the Commission and Parliament, we are witnesses of a new openness, which comes not only from Parliament's new powers, but also, as we heard back in the autumn, from Mr Barroso's desire to establish a special partnership with Parliament. It is a fact that particular provisions of the preliminary Framework Agreement on cooperation between the two institutions significantly strengthen Parliament's role in the decision-making process, making this process more democratic. The devil, however, is in the detail, which is why we are going to watch the negotiations closely all the way, to make sure that promises, such as including Parliament in the process of building EU diplomacy, will be kept.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.50 and resumed at 12.05)

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

5. Voting time

President. – The next item is voting time.

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

5.1. Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission (B7-0091/2010) (vote)

– *Before the vote:*

José Manuel Barroso, *President of the Commission*. – Mr President, a few months ago in my political guidelines and here in plenary, I proposed taking this special partnership between Parliament and the Commission to a new level. I proposed further enforcing and developing our relations in a positive way to reflect the new treaty and to reflect our shared sense of purpose to shape Europe together.

In the last few weeks, I had in-depth discussions with the team of negotiators led by Mr Lehne, whom you appointed, for the revision of the Framework Agreement. Let me take this opportunity to thank all of them for very intensive discussions, but also for their constructive approach.

I am deeply satisfied that we have now found a common understanding on the principles that will govern our relationship in the coming years. They should reinforce our cooperation in full respect of the institutional balance set up by the treaties.

As President of the European Commission, I will subscribe to the principles laid down in the resolution you have just adopted. They will guide me in developing the position of the new College on the revision of the full Framework Agreement.

With the adoption of this resolution by such an impressive majority of this House, I am confident that we have an excellent base for reinforcing our relationship. For those issues that concern not only our two institutions but also the Council, I sincerely hope the Council will join us in this common effort to improve the work of all the institutions for the benefit of Europe.

If you approve the new College later today, I will ask Vice-President designate Šefčovič to lead negotiations on the Commission side to revise the Framework Agreement. I wish to assure you that he is as committed as I am – as, I am sure, are all the new College – to effective and swift negotiations.

President. – Thank you very much, President Barroso, for your very positive approach to our negotiations. On behalf of us all, I would like to thank our negotiating group, chaired by Mr Lehne, and all colleagues who were so committed to the negotiations.

(Applause)

We do not as yet have a legislative initiative based on the Treaty of Lisbon, but we have been promised an answer on our expectations from the Commission. Not only do we have Question Hour with the President of the European Commission, but also Question Time with the Commissioners, an invitation from the President of the European Commission to the President of the European Parliament and to the College of Commissioners, and our common cooperation with national parliaments, which is very important.

We are thinking about the subsidiarity rule; we need an impact assessment to improve it as far as possible, and we hope it will be much stronger from this point of view than was originally the case in our agreement, but there is still much hope for all of us that we can do everything that is necessary for our citizens in the future.

(The sitting was suspended at 12.10 and resumed at 13.30)

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

6. Voting time (continued)

President. – Before the vote, we will hear speeches from the chairs of the political groups on the election of the new Commission.

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE Group. – *(FR)* Mr President, Mr López Garrido, President of the Commission, thank you for giving me the opportunity to say why I firmly believe, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), that Mr Barroso and his College of Commissioners, assisted by members of staff from the Commission, will be equal to the challenges that they face.

Europe was born of an international crisis and, for the first time in 60 years, it is facing a new international crisis that is of a different type but that is undoubtedly serious and dangerous. It is overcoming it, although we are not yet out of the woods. The euro has done its job as a monetary shield; there will never be enough words to say how much we owe it: the automatic stabilisers, those famous solidarity mechanisms, which are too ... You have benefited a great deal from them, my friends!

(Applause)

Where would you be now without the solidarity stabilisers? Too often they have been regarded as a burden weighing down our economies, but they have done a great deal to keep the European model afloat. An attractive, much-copied model to which our fellow citizens are rightly attached, but which is being called into question by new challenges.

The world has become multipolar, but not in the way we dreamed; we dreamed that it would be idealistic, peaceful and multilateral. No, the world has become one of competition, of a struggle – a peaceful one, certainly, but a fierce one – to impose one's model on the others.

In the face of this challenge, the Union, which has so many tools at its disposal, must not waste them. It must remain true to itself, by embracing ideas and people, and by pioneering the fight against global warming, but it must also arm itself with the resources to compete.

That is, I know, what the new Commission is going to strive to achieve with us. We all know about Europe's weaknesses: demographics, lack of future expenditure, industrial challenges, government deficit, weak economic governance. That is one more reason why we should make the most of our tools: the euro and monetary policy, technological achievements, industrial flagships, agricultural potential to guarantee the food security of our 500 million fellow citizens.

To this end, I expect the Commission to show imagination and leadership in the European legislation that we will be called on to adopt. I expect it to defend European interests, to demand reciprocity from our partners and to have no hesitation in resorting to the legal means at its disposal in the event of violations.

Commissioners, it is your responsibility, with us, with the Council, to complete the internal market. To do so, we must break taboos such as those of taxation and of the social dimension. The Member States can no longer act as though these two areas are restricted and untouchable competences, beyond the scope of common action.

At the same time, however, we must be much more forceful with regard to the external challenges: security and defence, but also trade, technological and industrial standards, and environmental standards. Europe must defend its values, peace and the prosperity of its citizens. Europe must be an international player and not merely an area of prosperity and of law. It must not deprive itself of the tools that come with its power.

The PPE Group expects the Commission to work effectively on all these fronts, at the same time. If it does so – and I have no reason to doubt it – it will always have the support of the PPE Group.

Mr Barroso, the PPE Group has faith in you; it asks you to be bold, to reform. It asks you to be far-sighted, for the benefit of the cause that brings us together: the creation of political Europe.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has not made its decision lightly. We voted on the President of the Commission five months ago in this House and although we did not give him our support then, he received the majority vote. On the basis of this majority, which regrettably rested on people who are actually not in favour of the Treaty of Lisbon, he has presented a College to us and today we are to assess this College.

It is also necessary for us to assess this College. There are two options open to us: we can go and divide this House into those on the Right and those on the Left. These two groups have conflicting ideologies and must vote accordingly. That is one option. However, this is not the way that Europe works. We do not have a majority in this Parliament. The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) does not have a majority in this Parliament either, nor has the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Europe is not an entity in which any political force whatsoever can alone cobble together a majority and say that Europe will now be governed in a particular way. Europe is a permanent compromise. That is what sometimes makes it so cumbersome and also so difficult to understand. However, better a permanent compromise, which leads to successes and more social justice, than an ideological battle that ultimately fizzles out without any tangible results.

(Applause)

It is therefore very difficult for us to weigh up the benefits. Of course, we all enjoy a tussle. I, too, enjoy arguing principles with fellow Members from other groups, but Europe also needs tangible results. We therefore asked ourselves what we, as Social Democrats – as Socialists and Democrats – can call for and get accepted. We then defined criteria. One criterion was that we wanted the political force that is the second-strongest force in Europe to be represented on a higher level in this Commission. We therefore wanted the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and we succeeded in getting this post in place.

I would like to say something with regard to the person holding this post. Baroness Ashton must not allow herself to be called a communist in this Parliament by a man who, in France, has been convicted of denying the Holocaust. Baroness Ashton has our full support.

(Sustained applause)

We asked whether we could introduce a social impact assessment into European Union legislation as a regulatory mechanism. For us, the question was whether measures – such as the Services Directive in the past – could still be set in motion at all. No, we wanted a mechanism for examining any measures that this Commission is to take in terms of their impact on the social security systems of the Member States before they are taken. This was incorporated. We wanted – and, for me, this is a quantum leap in European policy – the legislative resolutions of this Parliament to be turned into the Commission's own legislative initiatives

within a year. That is a huge step forward, because it means that the right of initiative of this Parliament, which unfortunately does not exist, will be secured by indirect means. We see this as significant progress.

Ultimately, as the second-strongest force in this Parliament and also as a group without which no qualified majority would be possible in this House, we wanted to be represented in the Commission. Three of the seven vice-presidents are Social Democrats. In this respect, you have largely accommodated us. In recent weeks and months, we have voiced many concerns, including in our debate this morning. In weighing up these concerns against the progress made, we decided to offer you our support for the next five years. When I say 'you', I mean the College of Commissioners. You can count on our support if you take seriously what I say to you: Europe will either be a social Europe or it will fail. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that it becomes a more social Europe. The S&D Group will support this Commission.

(Applause)

Guy Verhofstadt, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, my group will offer its support to the European Commission. The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats is a responsible group and we firmly believe that the next five years will be so critical for the European Union and European citizens that we will need a Commission that will have broad pro-European support in this Parliament.

But let me also be very clear. Our support is conditional, more so than during the last five years. We expect the new European Commission to be the engine of the European Union. We want a Commission with a bolder, more ambitious and more integrated economic and social approach, a Commission that is at the forefront of such a strategy – a strategy that can force Member States to do what they have to do.

I think that, certainly in the eurozone, we have to recognise that there is a great need for a true economic and social pillar next to the existing monetary pillar. The problems in the eurozone today are clear proof of the failure of the weak approach that we have followed over the last 10 years with the so-called open coordination method. The same is true in other areas – on climate change, on foreign policy and on defence policy.

The basic assumption behind this new bold approach is the recognition that in fact, in the multipolar world of tomorrow, Europe cannot play a significant role without being more effective and without further deepening its own integration in the near future. We expect you to embrace this assumption and to come forward with clear, firm and ambitious proposals and reforms in all these fields. We expect that, to achieve this, the Commission will use the right of initiative to its full potential. I am clearly talking about the Commission as a whole, working as a college, as a cohesive political body pushing European integration forward. A strong Commission may be helpful, but a strong Commission in that respect is indispensable.

The Lisbon Treaty offers new tools and has enhanced our capacity for action. High Representative Ashton, we ask you to use these new tools. We expect more from a High Representative than we have seen until now. Your role demands it and the European Union requires it. Take the opportunities. The lesson we learned from Haiti is an example. Put the report to establish a European civil protection force on the Council table immediately. Having said that, my group will support this Commission, with its strong liberal presence, and we are prepared to offer our commitment to advance the European cause with her.

(Applause)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, you know very well that the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance will not vote for this Commission, and, at the same time, we are offering you our ideas, our imagination and our European determination.

Mr Barroso, do not play the game of saying that those who fail to vote for the Commission are against Europe. Not with us, the European Greens. You can play that game with others, but not with us. We propose to cooperate unconditionally with you if you wish to make progress on a European tax system. If you wish Europe to have its own resources, we will support you against the Member States' defence of their economic sovereignty. I will name them: whether it be Germany, or France, we will support you.

If you wish to be the guardians of the treaties – there are, for example, negotiations taking place today within the Council aimed at returning the refugees to Libya, and we ask the Council to tell us what the legal basis of those negotiations is. Will Parliament be part of the ordinary legislative procedure? The Council tells us: 'you will be told that at the end of the negotiations'. That is impossible; it is the Commission's responsibility to intervene to ensure that the European institutions are informed of the legal basis of those negotiations.

I can give you a whole host of examples. If you want to make progress on climate change, if you want Europe to go further than the three times twenty, if you want to get closer to 30%, you will have the support of the entire Verts/ALE Group. If you want to go further in the field of financial regulation after the financial crisis, you will have our full support. If you and your Commission want to go further with regard to the protection of Europe, you will have our support. If you want to solve the Cyprus problem, you will have our support. If you want to see an end, finally, to this crazy situation in which a country such as Greece – as I said earlier – spends 4.3% of its GDP on defence, you will have our support. You will have it unconditionally!

For this reason, Mr Barroso, I am saying that we will vote 'No' now, but that we may be making a mistake. We know that we made a mistake last time where Mr Dimas was concerned. We made a mistake, and we admit it. Therefore, if you can live up to our dreams, and not live up to the expectations that we have of you following today, we will say frankly that we made a mistake, and we will support you.

(Applause)

Timothy Kirkhope, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, some Member States believe the nomination of a Commissioner is a useful opportunity to sort out a domestic problem or settle a political debt. The European Commission should bring together the most talented and effective political leaders from across Europe, people with experience and competence to help it address the enormous challenges we face.

After years of institutional wrangling, Europe needs to refocus its efforts on delivering results in areas where it can add value to the work of the Member States, and where our fellow citizens expect the nations of Europe to cooperate. It must support efforts to nurture fragile economic recovery and to generate growth and jobs, and has to play a leading role in tackling energy security and climate change. It must propose central reforms to the European budget and many of the key expenditure programmes.

In Mr Barroso, we have the right leader to take the Commission forward. In his political guidelines, he outlines an ambitious agenda to focus on the issues that matter, an agenda which, in general, we support. Every single Member State should have backed his efforts by sending the strongest possible nominee as Commissioner, and in some cases, he has been badly let down. Of course he must back every member of his team – we would expect nothing less from a leader in his position – and, in organising his team, although we question some portfolios, he has probably done his best with what he has got.

But whilst some nominees are excellent and performed well in the hearings, others are mediocre and made a poor impression. Some distanced themselves from his own political guidelines. Mr President, if the vote is favourable, we will, of course, engage constructively with every Commissioner and we still hope to be positively surprised, but please let us at least have an annual assessment by this Parliament of the Commission.

This is still a fundamentally flawed process and one we cannot endorse fully. For these reasons, the European Conservatives and Reformists will today abstain on this vote. Some groups are disunited; we are united in that position.

Lothar Bisky, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, my group also participated actively in the hearings of the candidates. Some of them made a thoroughly positive impression on us. We are less enthusiastic about the new arrangement of many of the portfolios. That also includes the rather mysterious – although perhaps soon to be less mysterious – area of responsibility of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is also Vice-President of the Commission.

However, we found many of the candidates disappointing in terms of their specialist knowledge. In this regard, all of our questions related primarily to political projects. In what direction should the European integration process go? Which measures are most important to the Commission candidate? There were far too many vague answers to these questions and answers that, politically speaking, we do not support. Despite claims of a more social Europe, they persisted in advocating a route towards deregulation, privatisation or the flexicurity concept. The flexibility of workers was the top priority and social security was right at the bottom.

Climate protection is on the agenda, but we are not seeing a move away from coal-powered generation of electricity or from nuclear power. I do not see the EU taking a leading role in climate protection and in development aid. Nothing has been said about consistent disarmament, especially with regard to nuclear weapons within Europe. Mr Barroso, Mr President, as much as I appreciate the candidates coming forward for the hearing, my group is unable to give your College a positive vote.

Nigel Farage, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Mr President, in generations to come, children will be told a story. They will be told that once upon a time, Europe was divided; there was a big wall down the middle of it and the people in the East were very poor and they had no democracy, and they lived under an evil system called Communism that killed millions of its own people. But, joy of joys, the wall came down and we finished up with 27 nations, and those people lived in democracy and 500 million people lived in peace...

(Applause)

There is more. I promise you, there is more.

(Applause)

Well, I must say that is the first time I have ever received such applause and I am tempted, Mr Verhofstadt, to sit down but, if I may, sadly, the story continues.

The politicians in charge became very greedy; they wanted money for themselves and they wanted power. So they resorted to lies and deceit, they staged the most spectacular bureaucratic *coup d'état* that the world had ever seen. But they did not need to use any bullets to do it. They were much cleverer, much more scheming than that. What they did is they put in place a new treaty – it was called the Lisbon Treaty. Then they gave 27 people total unlimited power. These would have been the people who made all the laws. Of course, they already had a flag, and they already had an anthem, but they went about building a new state. But they ignored the people. What they did, whether they knew it or not, was to recreate the very evil system that the people in Eastern Europe had lived under before. But the incredible thing was that many of the new bosses had also worked for that same evil system before. Well, of course, the plan was flawed and their fanciful monetary scheme collapsed. But, still, the new bosses would not listen to the people. No, they made life tougher and tougher: they put tens of millions into poverty; they denied people a say and, in the end, those people had to resort to violence to get back their nation states and their democracies.

The moral of the story is that they had learnt nothing from history. Members of the European Parliament, before you give this Commission power, remember that 60 years ago, an Iron Curtain came down on Europe but now, with this Commission, there is an economic iron fist and it is being felt in Greece today.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Mr President, after the fairytale that you have just heard, I would like to return to reality. My son is seventeen years old and is studying English very intensively, because he knows that English is the working language, and he hopes that it will help him to get an appropriate job. He is an enthusiastic European, but is dissatisfied with European politics – and rightly so. In Germany, the magazine *Der Spiegel* is already writing about widespread political contempt – and rightly so. Nevertheless, millions of young Europeans want a functional, competent and bold democracy in the 21st century. Yet, what are we being offered here today by the Commission? Are these the competent people – and the best people – that we need?

Those of us up here in the back row represent an independent group of citizens who have played a key role in ensuring that the right-wing radicals in this House do not set up a group once again. We are passionate pro-Europeans, but this is precisely why we are extremely disappointed by the people that you have presented us with and by the quality of these people. Would we employ an assistant here who becomes a laughing stock like Günther Oettinger has done on YouTube in 'Oettinger talking English'? Presumably not. From the point of view of competence, would we want to deal with an Austrian Commissioner who has not proven himself at all in his area.

Mr Barroso, there are very many experienced parliamentarians here in Parliament that you could adorn yourself with. You have one of them, for example, in the shape of the Swede, that is true. Yet, why do you not want Mr Karas? Why have you not taken a German from here, instead of the ones you have? Because you are not allowed to. Because, despite the Treaty of Lisbon, we are still restrained, because we are still not so independent that we can make sovereign decisions – you cannot and neither can we as Parliament.

Unfortunately, we are also still not allowed to elect individual commissioners. That is a type of democracy that we had in Austria in the 19th century. It is not appropriate for the Europe that we need, of which we dream. Please take heed: if you continue in this way, you will be playing into the hands of the nationalists and, indeed, the opponents of the EU. Instead, we need more democracy.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, my sentiments exactly. I shall be very brief. Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Schulz has referred to me – not by name but precisely enough – as having been found guilty of revisionism by the French courts.

I would like to tell Mr Schulz that he is mistaken, and I have at his disposal, and at the disposal of the entire European Parliament Committee on immunities, the momentous decision of the French supreme court, the Court of Cassation, which overturned all the sentences handed down to me and which, in its exceptional judgment, declared that I had been prosecuted on the basis of parts of sentences artificially put together to form a statement and that, furthermore, though cobbled together in this way by my political opponents, this statement did not come within the provisions of the law. This is an exceptionally rare decision, since the Court overturned a lower court ruling and decided the case itself, which happens very rarely with the French Court of Cassation. This overturning of a ruling and judgment of a case by the Court of Cassation became part of our legal history for the first time during the Dreyfus affair. Therefore, Mr Gollnisch is as innocent as Mr Dreyfus.

(The President interrupted the speaker)

I should like to add something. I did not say that Baroness Ashton was a communist. I said that she was one of those pacifists who Lenin might have called a fellow traveller.

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Thank you. It was only supposed to be a personal statement.

6.1. Presentation of the College of Commissioners (B7-0071/2010) (vote)

6.2. Appointment of the Commission (B7-0090/2010) (vote)

President. – I would like to warmly congratulate the newly elected College of Commissioners and President Barroso: congratulations to all of you. There is a huge amount of work ahead of us, and the expectations of our citizens are high; it is a time for action and delivery. I will immediately inform the rotating Presidency of the Council and the President of the European Council of the result of our votes and the appointment of the European Commission until 31 October 2014. Thank you very much, and congratulations once again.

(Applause)

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, on behalf of the Council of the European Union, I would very briefly like to congratulate Mr Barroso and the Commission as a whole on the vote of approval, the support and the trust that it has been given by this House, the European Parliament.

In the coming months and years, these two institutions, the Commission and the European Parliament, are going to play a decisive role in confronting the challenges that the European Union is facing: tackling climate change, security, economic globalisation, preventing a crisis such as the one that we are still experiencing, launching the new initiatives and institutions of the Treaty of Lisbon (the citizens' initiative, the solidarity clause and, of course, the European External Action Service).

The Commission and the European Parliament are going to play an essential role in all of these things, and we as the Council want the Commission to work hard. It certainly has many powers, which are not unlimited, as has been said here, but it does, of course, have the power to do what it needs to do. We want the Commission to work quickly and wisely, because this is what the European public wants. Following the period of institutional uncertainty that Europe has experienced, they also want us all to get to work in order to make up for lost time and immediately launch this new political phase, this new situation in Europe, the definitive Europe of the 21st century.

I therefore want to say, Mr Barroso, that your speech was pro-European, and that you will have the full support of the Council, as will the European Parliament, to create more Europe and to bring Europe closer to the citizens represented in Parliament, because the citizens are, ultimately, at the heart of Europe.

President. – Thank you, Mr López Garrido, Secretary of State for European Affairs in the Spanish Government. Thank you. Now Mr Barroso has the floor.

José Manuel Barroso, *President of the Commission*. – Mr President, very briefly I wish to express on my own behalf, and on behalf of all the members of the Commission, my sincerest gratitude for the confidence that has just been placed in us. We are proud and humbled by the vote. We see there is strong support across the political spectrum; this is an important moment for Europe, a real mandate for boldness.

I also want to thank the President of the Council for his warm words. I believe we now have the conditions to go to work. But let me just make a comment. During this vote, I have heard here some remarks and I want to state very clearly that those who compare totalitarian Soviet Union with the European Union do not know what it was to live under dictatorship and they do not know what democracy is.

(Applause)

In the European Union, we have a democratic European Parliament, and this is democracy. In the European Union, we have a European Commission elected by you as the elected representatives of the citizens of Europe, and this is democracy. We believe that, now, with the democratic legitimacy which was given to us by you, by the designation of the democratic governments of all of our 27 Member States, we are proud and confident in working with full determination for the good of democracy in Europe, a Europe which is, in fact, a beacon of freedom in the world.

President. – Voting time is closed, and it is a time for congratulations.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, we will now proceed to the explanations of vote.

There are 16 Members who wish to give an explanation of vote. I would like to remind you all that the procedure allows them to submit the text in writing, which means that they do not need to hurry their speeches as their points are set out more precisely in the verbatim report of proceedings.

Firstly, we have three explanations of vote regarding the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission. Each of the speakers will have one minute.

7. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

Motion for a resolution B7-0091/2010

Clemente Mastella (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Framework Agreement that we have just adopted considerably improves the role of the European Parliament – a role that has grown thanks to the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon.

President Barroso, we have given you our confidence, and we expect you for your part to have respect for our greater prerogatives.

In particular, we consider it fundamental to collaborate more closely, with the aim of establishing a regular dialogue between the two institutions. We take as a cue the undertakings that you have given in this Chamber, your willingness to institutionalise a regular dialogue on key fundamental questions and on important legislative proposals, and the undertaking you have made to report on the practical follow-up to each legislative initiative request within three months of its adoption.

Mr President, our institutions will be called upon to implement the so-called 'democratic method' by establishing a special partnership with a view to defining, implementing and, above all, safeguarding the true interest of Europe. This is a greater responsibility for the Commission, but also for us, the direct representatives of the citizens of this Europe of ours.

Mr President, all these goals require a greater commitment by all: by the Commission, by Parliament, by national parliaments and by governments. This is the Europe that citizens demand of us and this is the Europe that we must be able to guarantee them over the next five years.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, I have voted in favour of the Commission and I am also in favour of the Framework Agreement, which represents an historic step forward. Despite this, I have voted against the resolution, because we received it yesterday as a finished text and were not able to debate it seriously and because the devil is in the detail. For that reason, I would like to make it clear that I have concerns about the wording in many places, for example, with regard to the rights of individual MEPs to ask questions or the risk of collusion between the Commission and Parliament in respect of the agenda if the Commission attends the Conference of Presidents.

I therefore ask that further corrections be made in the final negotiation of the text. It has rightly been said that Parliament has more power. We need a close partnership with the Commission, but we do not need collusion. We need more democracy, not less, because with this additional power comes the need for more democracy within Parliament.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – (FR) Mr President, no one in this Chamber can really believe that, of the 500 million Europeans, these 27 candidates are the best qualified to become European commissioners. The Commission exercises exorbitant powers. As well as being the European executive, it initiates legislation. Who, though, are we going to appoint to exercise these powers? A series of compromise candidates nominated by the national governments as thanks for services rendered or, quite simply, to keep rivals at bay.

Let us take, for example, my own country's candidate, Baroness Ashton. We are told that the French Government opposes her because she does not speak French. Yet, Mr President, that is the least of her failings! Baroness Ashton has never put herself in a position where she has to face universal suffrage. How can the European Union teach Iran or Cuba about democracy when that woman, who manages its external service, is herself a non-elected official? Baroness Ashton and her federalist friends treat us as anti-Europeans. If, however, she and her friends from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had won the fight, our continent would have remained divided and hundreds of millions of Europeans would still be subjected to Marxist tyranny. No true European ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Motion for a resolution B7-0071/2010

Viktor Uspaskich (ALDE). – (LT) Certainly, I, too, would like to welcome and congratulate the new Commission, the new Members, but I would like to draw attention to some facts that were not debated in either the political groups or the parliamentary sessions, the plenary sessions; the appointment of the Members themselves. In my political group, I said that at least those candidates who enjoy the support of two thirds of their national parliament should be appointed to the European Commission. That is one point.

The other thing which was not debated and which I believe is very important is that the new Commission should pay particular attention to protecting the European Union's business people from imports from those countries that do not share the values we promote. Values such as the environment, social guarantees and, at the end of the day, democratic institutions. This is precisely where more money needs to be spent, because such imports increase the prices of our services and goods and make it difficult for our business people to compete ...

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – (FR) Mr President, Baroness Ashton and her federalist friends treat us as anti-Europeans. If, however, she and her friends from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament had won the fight, our continent would have remained divided and hundreds of millions of Europeans would still be subjected to Marxist tyranny. No true European and no true democrat can, in all conscience, support these candidates. By voting for them, solely on account of their support for European integration, this House is judging itself.

Motion for a resolution B7-0090/2010

Iva Zanicchi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to have cast my vote in favour of this new College of Commissioners. I am pleased because I have seen men and women who are highly expert, and have clear and defined programmes. With your permission, I should first of all like to wish success in his job to Mr Tajani, because he is a man of great worth who will be able to make a great contribution to European industry.

Finally, as Vice-Chair of the Committee on Development, I must emphasise the excellent impression made by Commissioner-designate Georgieva. She is truly a determined and capable woman who will be an excellent point of reference for the Committee on Development. I wish them all success in their jobs.

Peter Jahr (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, in view of the enormous challenges facing Europe, it is important and a very welcome fact that we have an effective Commission. In addition, cooperation between Parliament and the Commission, on an equal footing and based on trust, is vital if we want to succeed. The agreement adopted today will form an important basis for this.

Parliament now has full powers of codecision and therefore has equal standing with the Commission and the Council in all areas. In light of this, we will cooperate intensively with the Commission – on the basis of trust, but not without discernment. The SWIFT agreement in particular demonstrates that no more issues may be decided without Parliament. I very much expect us in this House to be able to debate the SWIFT agreement once more.

Alfredo Antoniozzi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted in favour of the Barroso Commission because I am sure that it will be able to meet the challenges that the economic and financial crisis compels us to face with courage and determination.

I hope, moreover, that some of the topics that are particularly close to my heart will be tackled with the necessary attention. I refer particularly to regional policy, which acquires a fundamental importance when we talk of the growth and development of our territories and which must absolutely not suffer cuts following the reform of the European Union budget.

I also hope that support will be provided to tackle the housing crisis faced by our fellow citizens, which often reaches alarming levels, particularly in the great conurbations. I therefore hope that specific financial instruments for social housing and other housing policies will again be among the priorities of the new Commission, to which I offer my sincerest wishes for its work.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, several months ago, it was with complete conviction that I voted for Mr Barroso to be head of the European Commission. Quite honestly, there was no alternative. Mr Verhofstadt, the liberal alternative, and Mr Juncker, the federalist alternative, were not acceptable. Today, as someone who endorsed Mr Barroso, I must say, with sadness, that the Commission he has presented has very many shortcomings in its personnel. I cannot support, and neither can my colleagues support, a Commission which includes a Commissioner who, quite frankly, is still learning her profession. If she were a student of international relations, and expressed herself at an oral examination as she did at the hearings, she would probably be thrown out of the room. She would not pass any examination at all in Poland. I cannot endorse a Commission in which the Danish Commissioner wants to close coal mines, including mines in my country. This is another reason why I abstained from voting. It is my conviction that this Commission has very many question marks over it, and we are going to be watching the Commission carefully.

Joe Higgins (GUE/NGL). – Mr President, I voted against the appointment of the new EU Commission because it will simply continue with the same right-wing, neoliberal economic policy that has already resulted in disastrous crisis in the capitalist economies of many EU States. This – allegedly new – EU Commission will turn out to be the same stale old wine with the same old neoliberal Barroso label.

These policies of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation – implemented, let us be clear, at the behest of European big business – are having disastrous consequences for the lives of working-class people, with mass unemployment and savage attacks on living standards. In its attitude to the crisis in Greece and in Ireland, the leadership of the EU Commission is agreed that it is the working class who will pay the price, while the bankers and speculators are bailed out. European workers and the poor in Europe must mobilise their power against these disastrous policies and for a genuinely democratic and socialist Europe, and that means opposing the policies of this new EU Commission.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Due to the very limited time allotted I can, of course, only pick a few of the very many reasons why we did not throw our support behind this European Commission. One of these reasons, for example, is the fact that the present European Commission is continuing as normal on the path towards the accession of non-European, Islamist Turkey to the European Union, even though this is categorically opposed by a large majority of Europeans, who themselves have never had the opportunity to express their opinion on the matter.

Another reason is the fact that this European Commission continues to argue in favour of the renewed immigration of millions and, in the long term, even tens of millions of new non-European immigrants to a continent which, in any case, already has tens of millions of unemployed people. A further reason is the fact that it has already been revealed in the hearings that not a single one of the new European commissioners is prepared to do anything about the democratic deficit.

These are reasons enough not to vote for this new European Commission.

Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we have not received definite or satisfactory answers from the new Commission concerning the fight against illegal immigration within the European Union. That alone would be sufficient to withhold approval from its work and from its programme.

There is also another fact. The Commission and, above all, its President, has shown itself to be very reluctant to accept Parliament's legislative initiatives. This is somewhat of a breach of democracy, at least that is how it comes across. We Members of Parliament are the only directly elected representatives of the people, and failure to comply with our right of initiative, or at least attempts to flout it – even if, under the new Treaty of Lisbon, this is now sanctioned by Article 255 of the treaties – does not allow for a vote of confidence in Mr Barroso or in his Commissioners.

Syed Kamall (ECR). – Mr President, when you look at the gallery of candidates that were there before us today, I think most people across the House, regardless of their politics, would have said that some were good, some might have been very, very good, some were bad and some were just pretty poor. Unfortunately, some of them have also not answered all the questions about their past. But, as Members of the European Parliament, we are unable to vote on the individual Commissioners, so we had a choice whether to vote for all of them en bloc or to reject them. That is very sad and to be regretted and, for that reason, I abstained.

We heard Mr Barroso talk about a Europe that responds to a crisis. If we really want to respond to a crisis, let us make sure we are not piling on more and more inappropriate regulation. Let us make sure that we have proper impact assessments on any directive or regulations. Take as a case in point the Directive on Alternative Investment Fund Managers, which will reduce the amount of money available to entrepreneurs in Europe, which will drive creators of wealth out of the European Union, and which will reduce investment in developing countries. If only we were able to reduce the amount of regulation going through this place!

Nirj Deva (ECR). – Mr President, I was elected by the people of the south-east of England to reform the EU. Block voting for all the 27 commissioners with one vote is business as usual: not reform, not transparency, not accountability, not responsible confirmation. Mr Barroso has my personal confidence; so do some of the other commissioners with whom I have had dealings in the past. But that does not mean a vote of confidence in the whole College of Commissioners. Each commissioner is unique in political history. No other person in a so-called democracy has the power to initiate, legislate and execute the same legislation and not be elected individually by anybody. This is wholly unacceptable, Mr President, and therefore I regretfully had to abstain.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) I voted against the new Commission because there is not a single indication that the new Commission will start to work on reducing the gap between the average European and the European institutions, in particular, the European Commission.

I listened to the then Commissioner-designate for Enlargement during his hearing in the Foreign Affairs Committee, in which he appeared to demonstrate, for example, a very high degree of readiness to sweep all complaints against the accession of non-European Turkey under the carpet, as has happened for five years now.

The new Commission also wants more economic immigration, even more patronising behaviour and even more meddling, all of which is certainly a particularly disgraceful state of affairs under the Treaty of Lisbon, which offers a far from reassuring perspective.

Gerard Batten (EFD). – Mr President, I voted against the Commission because I do not want to be governed by a European Commission of any composition, but there are particular reasons for voting against this one. A number of its Members were members of the Communist Party, or were associated with it. For example, they include Mr Barroso, Mr Šefčovič, Mr Füle, Mr Piebalgs and Mr Potočnik, to name just a few. Baroness Ashton was treasurer of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which was little better than a Communist-front organisation, and a proportion of its funding came from the Soviet bloc.

She is not fit to be responsible for foreign security and defence policy. The noble Baroness worked to undermine the defence policy of her own country when we faced the gravest threat – a nuclear threat – from our enemies. The Commission is the new *de facto* government of the European Union. Europe is sleep-walking towards disaster. We are now governed by communists, collaborators and quislings.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, I was pleased to vote in favour of the Commission today because I think, in the circumstances and under the rules of the House, it was the right thing to do. We need a Commission, and we have one now.

However, the point has been made – and well made – by a number of colleagues that it would be a better system if each of the Commissioners were elected on their own merits rather than *en bloc*. After all, if you were putting out a football team to represent you, you would not select them *en bloc*. You would select each player on his merits so that you get the best possible result. I think we should work towards that situation and to reform the rules to ensure that the next time we are electing a Commission, each of them would be elected on merit. That would force the countries to put forward the best possible candidates and ensure that candidates would perform to the maximum. I think we would have a better team by doing that. But, in the meantime, I look forward to working as closely as possible with the Commission over the next five years.

Paul Rübig (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, I am pleased that there has been a high level of consensus in Parliament today. Many have called for a strong Europe. Consensus makes us strong, and I am therefore pleased to see such a positive outcome of the vote on the new Commission. At the end of the day, only an effective Europe can also be a social Europe. The Commission has made a clear commitment in this regard, because ultimately we can only distribute what has already been produced. It is therefore important for us to concern ourselves with training and education and to focus on infrastructure and research in Europe.

It is relatively simple to make the rich poor, but it is a rather more intelligent, challenging and far-reaching task to make the poor rich. That should remain the goal of Europe.

Written explanations of vote

Motion for a resolution B7-0091/2010

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), in writing. – Interinstitutional relations between the Parliament and the Commission are moving in a different direction with the Lisbon Treaty. We parliamentarians are sending a clear message to the Commission that the European Parliament never again will be a mere observer but an equal player in the shaping of European policy. Policy actions at the Community level lack coherence and leave Europe totally disabled when unexpected situations come up. And when they do come up, we are unable to respond to them in an effective and coordinated manner. The President of the Commission has committed himself to engage in an open, transparent and constructive relationship with the European Parliament in order to set clear and feasible policy aims together and to ensure high quality legislation. It is now time for Mr Barroso to remember his promises and to ensure that the requests of the European Parliament are clearly reflected in the Framework Agreement.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), in writing. – (LT) I support this Framework Agreement, since cooperation between the European Parliament and the European Commission is particularly important in strengthening the stability of the European Union and the effectiveness of its work. According to this agreement, once a legislative initiative request has been submitted to the European Parliament, the European Commission must answer within a month, and prepare a suitable piece of European Union legislation within a year. If the European Union refuses to prepare the act requested, it will have to justify its decision in detail. Until now, only the European Commission was able to initiate European Union legislation, but in the Treaty of Lisbon, it is stipulated that a majority of the European Parliament has the right to create European Union legislation. Parliament and the Commission will cooperate closely at an early stage on any legislative initiative requests emanating from citizens' initiatives. When signing international treaties, European Parliament experts will also be included in the discussions. In the agreement, Parliament will be granted the right to participate as an observer in certain European Union international talks, as well as the right to obtain more information about international treaties.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI), in writing. – Whilst we agree with those parts of the proposal that provide for the equal treatment of Parliament with the Council with regard to access to meetings and to information; for regular dialogue between the President of the Commission and the President of the Parliament; cooperation on citizens' initiatives; impact assessments on legislation; and the use of 'soft law' (rather than punitive law?); we disagree with: a reaffirmation and strengthening of compulsory time limits for the

implementation of directives; and the use of congratulatory language about the European Union and its officers.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I welcome the motion for a resolution, which was approved today, on a new political Framework Agreement which will govern the institutional relations between the European Commission and the European Parliament and which will strengthen the powers of Parliament conferred by the Lisbon Treaty.

The guarantee that the Commission will apply the basic principle of equal treatment for Parliament and the Council is one of the aspects relevant to a new institutional balance that are addressed in this agreement.

I also emphasise the importance of regular dialogue between the Commission and Parliament, through access to meetings of the Conference of Presidents and the Conference of Committee Chairs, and meetings of the College of Commissioners, respectively.

Furthermore, the introduction of a new 'Question Hour' with the members of the Commission in plenary sessions will contribute towards better accountability of the executive.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution on a revised Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission for the next parliamentary term as it is an important agreement, not only for its symbolic value – given that it gives a clear signal of the commitment of both European institutions, Parliament and the Commission, to work together in pursuit of the European project – but also because of its content, since it identifies the obligations of the parties so that they can better confront the challenges of the future and resolve the problems of the citizenry.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The European Parliament has often been confronted with *faits accomplis* by the Commission or the Council, having been relegated to the role of merely ratifying a decision already taken. This situation, about which this Chamber has complained, has created an imbalance in the relations between the three principal European institutions. It is essential that Parliament, which is more and more by rights a partner of the Council in the decision-making process, should today merit the same attention from the Commission as it affords to the Council.

Rather than merely smoothing out rough edges, I sincerely hope that the revised Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission will accelerate procedures, lead to closer cooperation and promote the exchange of information in a swift and efficient manner, allowing the voice of the elected representatives of the Member States to be heard and taken into account in good time. In view of the way in which it was prepared, I believe that this will be possible.

For these reasons, the initiative of the President of the European Commission in seeking to establish a special partnership between Parliament and the institution over which he presides is fully justified. I hope it will not only flourish but also bear fruit.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) In view of the implications of the Lisbon Treaty regarding the operation of the European Union institutions and the reinforcement of shared responsibility in the decision-making process, it has become absolutely necessary to establish a set of procedures which ensure and guarantee the healthy and efficient exchange of information and points of view regarding the strategies for consolidating and developing European integration. The possibility of systematically having working meetings before each of the institutions produces legislative and regulatory material will surely promote joint working, the reconciliation of ideas, projects and perspectives and the improvement of draft decisions. In this way, we shall avoid administrative and bureaucratic procedures, particularly in respect of the return and correction of resolutions, thereby avoiding the risk of the multiplication of proposals and counterproposals.

This is an agreement which reinforces cooperation between the European institutions and which guarantees that the Commission will apply the basic principle of equality of treatment for Parliament and the Council. For these reasons, it is vital that there should be swift implementation of this Framework Agreement, and it is important to recognise the need for constant evaluation in order to improve the efficiency and efficacy of this institutional relationship.

Robert Goebbels (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I abstained on the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission. Parliament, as colegislator, should refrain from trying to acquire ever greater powers at the Commission's expense. The whole treaty, and nothing but the treaty: that is how Parliament curtails the Commission's right of initiative. As President Buzek said: 'We have just taken one step further

towards the right of Members to initiate legislation'. When the day comes for Members to make legislative proposals, each lobby will find a Member to serve its own interests. I want to keep the tried and tested Community method – with the Commission as guardian and judge of common European interests – from which the exclusive right of legislative initiative stems. Increasing the number of meetings between the Commission and Parliament's bodies is not the way to arrive at more effective European policy.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the new Framework Agreement between the Parliament and Commission. With the Lisbon Treaty now in force, this House has acquired increased powers and our working relationship with the Commission must adapt accordingly. I particularly welcome the section in the new Agreement requiring the Commission President to fully respond to the Parliament in the event of this House withdrawing its confidence in a Commissioner. Whilst I voted today in favour of the new Commission, I object to the all-or-nothing system whereby Parliament must approve or reject the Commission as a whole. Any procedure which enhances our capability to hold individual Commissioners to account is to be welcomed.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) The approval of the European Parliament for the new Commission does not constitute a *carte blanche*, but a vote of confidence. However, now we can finally begin our work together with a fully competent Commission. The role of the European Parliament was consolidated and strengthened with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and, with the Framework Agreement on relations between the European Parliament and the Commission that was adopted today, the establishment of the European Parliament as an equal partner with the Commission has been duly confirmed, and this is something that I expressly welcome. With this, we have created a good foundation for future cooperation and we will also insist emphatically on this dialogue as an equal partner. It will probably also be very much in the interests of the Commission to involve the European Parliament in legislative initiatives at an early stage in order to ensure an efficient process that is in the interests and for the benefit of the people in Europe and of an active democracy.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (FR) The Members of the European Parliament are elected by universal suffrage and, as such, represent the European public. It is therefore incredible that the Conference of Presidents should be content to beg for access to the same information as the Commission and the Council receive, or to attend some of their meetings, when they are actually invited to Parliament's meetings! How can it be that Parliament is not asserting its representative role so as to demand that its initiatives be endorsed as a matter of course by the Commission? Why is Parliament accepting the fact that the Commission can refuse it permission to withdraw its vote of confidence in a commissioner if it so requests? How is it acceptable that Parliament cannot give a binding opinion when the Commission changes its way of working?

How is it possible that Parliament is not making stronger demands for the chairs of delegations only to be granted observer status when they represent it in international conferences? For the Treaty of Lisbon to give the European Parliament the role of a rump Parliament is one thing, but for its Members to state their agreement with this nonsense is something entirely different. I shall vote against this decision out of respect for the dignity of the mandate that I received from the people of France.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, it has become necessary to negotiate a new Framework Agreement to govern the relations between the European Parliament and the Commission. The motion for a resolution, approved today by an overwhelming majority, reflects the new and extremely important role which the European Parliament is to assume. The spirit of the Lisbon Treaty is clearly present within this document, with the expansion of Parliament's responsibilities, the equal treatment for Parliament and the Council and Parliament's new prerogatives with respect to various matters. From this point of view, the approved motion expresses a deepening, in the right direction, of the constitutional process of the EU.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) The motion for a resolution on a revised Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission for the next parliamentary term contains some reasonable starting points. This includes the call for a guarantee by the Commission that it will, in future, apply the principle of equal treatment for Parliament and the Council, and also the setting of specific deadlines that the Commission must meet in connection with the submission of legislative initiatives.

However, the call for the President of the Commission to ask individual Members of the Commission to resign at the request of Parliament is unacceptable and senseless. This would only make sense if, in the election of the Commission, it was possible to vote for the individual candidates, which it currently is not. For this reason, I have voted against the motion for a resolution.

Birgit Schnieber-Jastram (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) I find the lack of a reference in the Framework Agreement to the European Parliament's control mechanisms and the lack of clarity in respect of the principles of power separation in parts of the agreement regrettable. I have therefore decided to abstain from the vote.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The Lisbon Treaty embodies a new institutional balance, which attributes to the European Parliament a significantly improved status with respect to the other institutions. The Framework Agreement aims to govern the daily relations between Parliament and the Commission in a partnership which is now reinforced and adapted to the new aspects of the Lisbon Treaty, taking as its point of departure the promises made by the recently elected President of the Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso, as well as his proposal for a 'Special Partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission'. The request for an undertaking by the Commission to respond in a short time period to all requests for legislative initiatives is to be welcomed as it reflects the increasing importance of the European Parliament as a colegislator, most specifically in areas such as Regional Policy. I also consider it to be extremely positive that the agreement includes a guarantee that the Commission will apply the basic principle of equality of treatment for Parliament and the Council, as well as a greater degree of interinstitutional cooperation in the preparation and execution of the Legislative Programme and Annual Work Programme. For these reasons, and above all because it reinforces the role of the European Parliament and reinvigorates the European Union, I voted in favour of the motion.

Róza, Gräfin von Thun Und Hohenstein (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) The new Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission contains several important elements. Firstly, the principle of equal treatment for Parliament and the Council, which strengthens the democratic warrant of the European Union. Secondly, it gives Parliament additional powers to monitor legislative initiatives from the Commission, thanks to which Parliament will have a greater influence on laws which are made.

A clause has been included in the agreement about the compulsory publication of correlation tables, which I called for in my report on internal market scoreboards, and binding time limits for implementation of directives, which should not exceed two years. Thanks to this, there is a chance that the plan to establish a common market will be completed faster. The agreement also strengthens the Community approach and improves the working of both institutions. It also obliges them to function in a way which will ensure that the European Union will be a true community.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the European Parliament resolution on a revised Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission for the next parliamentary term as I consider that this agreement is essential to cooperation between the European Parliament and the future European Commission. European institutions must ensure that the 'Community method' is used efficiently, for the benefit of Europe's citizens. In accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, which establishes a new institutional balance, the European Parliament can ask the Commission to submit legislative proposals, and the latter must submit the relevant legislative proposal within one year of the request being made by Parliament. The extension of Parliament's powers, interinstitutional cooperation and the promotion of simpler EU legislation ensure that the EU legislative process operates better and that citizens are involved more actively and directly in drafting European legislation. The Commission must regulate the procedures and conditions stipulated in the Treaty of Lisbon whereby EU citizens can invite the Commission to present a legislative proposal on issues which they regard as necessary.

Anna Záborská (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) The February 2010 plenary session is today witnessing the very start of the institutional cooperation that will continue for the next five years. Although Parliament began its internal work after the European elections and quickly decided on the distribution of the positions of responsibility and on its internal rules, it has taken us time to implement the arrangements for interinstitutional cooperation between the Council and the Commission in the light of the Treaty of Lisbon. The parallel process of appointing the future commissioners has certainly facilitated the introduction of a right of legislative initiative, which the European Parliament will enjoy from now on. Henceforth, the Commission has to report on the practical follow-up to any legislative initiative requests following the adoption of a legislative initiative report pursuant to Article 225 of the TFEU. If the European Parliament requests it by a simple majority, the Commission must present a legislative proposal within one year or include that proposal in the following year's work programme. I call on every person of goodwill to observe closely the work done by Parliament, because it is clear that the MEPs will use this provision in particular in the field of universal social ethics.

Motion for a resolution B7-0071/2010

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI), in writing. – Some might be surprised that we should support a motion by the GUE/NGL Group. Whilst we find ourselves agreeing with some of the group's criticism of the European Union, our view of what should replace the EU would be quite different. Furthermore, our ideologies are completely different. We are Nationalists, valuing the sovereignty of the nation state. They are internationalists. We believe in a system that is based on private enterprise, with some regulation, and with some ownership of public utilities, whilst they would, presumably, believe in much more state ownership. We agree with: the rejection of neoliberal economic policies; the need for greater social justice (though we might differ on definitions); and criticism of the evasion, incoherence and inadequate answers of some Commissioners. However, we are pleased to vote with anybody, if we agree with what they propose.

Carlo Casini (PPE), in writing. – (IT) With my emphatic vote in favour, I want to add greater force to the words spoken by President Barroso; words that gave notice of the construction over the next five years of a more united and stronger Europe.

He began his speech by recalling the fundamental values of European unity, the most important of which is human dignity. I agree wholeheartedly, but the problem is that the word 'dignity' has become ambiguous, because it is used not only to guarantee life and human equality, but also to discriminate against and do harm to the most vulnerable members of society and even to justify death. I hope, therefore, that in the next five years, the Commission will work in such a way that the word 'dignity' will be restored to its unambiguous and true meaning.

It is of symbolic importance that on 15 December last year, during the height of efforts to form the new Commission, 500 000 European citizens from 17 countries requested, in a collective petition, that our institutions interpret and implement the Charter of Fundamental Rights in every decision, on the basis of the equal dignity of every human being.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of the Commission-designate as I am conscious of the pivotal role that it plays in the structure of Europe as a whole and of the increasing importance that it has acquired as a producer of legislative initiatives. As a Portuguese, I cannot fail to express my delight at the fact that the demanding post of President of the Commission has once more been entrusted to my countryman, José Manuel Durão Barroso, a man who previously performed that role with undeniable distinction.

Conscious of the difficulties which recent times have brought, but inspired by the hope for better days for the European Union and the European project, I wish him, and his team, all possible success.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) In view of the principles of subsidiarity, representation and equal rights of the different Member States, I emphasise the importance of sharing responsibilities and competences among the members of the European Commission. In the context of the progressive deepening of cooperation between Member States and the increased importance of the European Union's capacity for global intervention, it would be incomprehensible to split up the various strategic and political decisions and choices within the European institutions.

All the new Commissioners were questioned and given an audience in the European Parliament, where they could express their expectations and projects in their respective areas of competency, always stressing the importance of sharing responsibilities by means of interaction between the different portfolios and competences which make up the European Commission. Rather than demonstrating any incapacity or hinting at presidentialism, this approach reinforces the spirit of codecision, promoted by a cooperative leadership which itself promotes an effective and useful dialogue for the consolidation of the European Union. Given the above, I voted against the motion.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The resolution tabled by the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left concerns important aspects of our appraisal of the College of Commissioners presented to this Parliament, and also summarises some of the fundamental reasons for our vote against this Commission: the presentation of a programme by the President of the Commission – to which the Commissioners will naturally feel linked and which they defended without any reservations in the hearings which took place in Parliament – which represents the continuation of the failed neoliberal policy of the previous Commission; and the fact that this team has been chosen to carry out this programme, following a strategy which will not result in the necessary changes in political orientation, in the sense of providing greater social justice, job creation and eradication of poverty, but instead contains dangerous elements that will exacerbate these serious problems. In sum, the Europe for which we fight – one of justice and social

progress, economic and social cohesion, cooperation between sovereign states with equal rights, and one that promotes peace – stands little chance of being reached with the guidelines that this Commission proposes to follow.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) After several weeks of hearings with the new Commissioners, this would not be an appropriate time to call into question the quality of a College of Commissioners which has, over many hours in various committees, already provided very useful clarifications about the policies to be adopted. Therefore, now is the time to provide the EU with a legitimate Commission which is capable of responding to the difficult events of recent times.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Parliament and the Commission will confront key issues for the European Union, namely the reversal of the crisis by means of the recovery of the economy and employment, the balancing of the public finances of the Member States and the negotiation of the financial framework for the post-2013 period, regarding which I would emphasise the importance of the cohesion policy.

I had the opportunity to question the Commissioner-designate for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, with regard to his interest in the creation of a specific programme of permanent financial support for the outermost regions.

I also presented him with a proposal for a more flexible system of eligibility for receipt of structural funds for 'transition' regions, i.e. those which find themselves caught between the objectives of 'convergence' and of 'competitiveness and employment'.

As well as displaying competence and rigour, the Commissioner-designate showed he was prepared to examine these possibilities, which gives me confidence in his future willingness and sensitivity towards outermost regions such as Madeira.

I gave my vote of confidence to this team of Commissioners, which will be led by José Manuel Barroso, as in general, they have shown good technical preparation, seriousness and ambition to be able to respond to the challenges of the EU without forgetting the values which underpin its creation, namely solidarity and territorial cohesion.

Motion for a resolution B7-0090/2010

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) Today, we approved the composition of the new European Commission, although we must recognise that doubts over candidate Commissioners were not dispelled entirely. Both the framework of the Commission's activities and the programmes of the individual Commissioners above all lack the social aspect. The impression is given that the main criteria the formulation of objectives and tasks is based on is the strengthening of Europe's role in the world, while our citizens' rights and hopes and social protection have been pushed into the background. The S&D Group has decided to support the Commission, because at a time when Europe is plagued by an endless economic and financial crisis and ever increasing unemployment and its citizens are disillusioned with Europe, the European Parliament and Europe in general must not become the place where there is division into camps of position and opposition. Now, the most important thing is to concentrate on these most important matters on the political agenda, to end the state of uncertainty and instability in Europe as soon as possible and to solve the most acute problems, like the financial crisis and unemployment, more quickly and effectively.

Bastiaan Belder (EFD), *in writing*. – (NL) The Barroso II Commission is a mixed bunch. In recent weeks, we have come across some strong, but also some very weak, candidates. That does not make it any easier to assess this Commission as a whole. This double-edged feeling is reinforced by the fact that many Commissioners-designate blatantly played up to the European Parliament during the hearings. Yet what they really stand for is even now still unclear sometimes.

The Dutch Reformed Political Party in the European Parliament has decided to refrain from voting. This is to give voice to the double-edged feeling that we have been left with by this Commission. However, there are other things going on. One Commissioner, who is also the first Vice-President, gives us fundamental concerns. Baroness Ashton has the dubious honour of being the first EU official to combine a career in the Commission with a position in the Council of Ministers. We cannot support this unjustified institutionally risky venture. What's more, Baroness Ashton has not, at any time, given us the impression of being able to cope with the pressures of this post. She is one of the weakest links in this Commission and has never given the impression of being truly at home with foreign affairs. We thus look ahead to the period 2010-2014 with some trepidation.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) We have a new Commission which has assumed its mandate at a difficult time, but which is made up of a group of professionals on whose shoulders lie the responsibilities of all 27 Member States. We have the Treaty of Lisbon which changes the configuration of power and requires adaptability from the Commission. Consequently, we have a European Union in a new, delicate situation, but which requires performance, stability and drive when it comes to proposing and implementing coherent policies.

We are facing a new financial outlook, which means a sensible response is required from the Commission through reform and new adjustments in every sector, starting with the economy.

All Member States are feeling the full magnitude of the financial crisis. The alarm bell sounded by Greece provides strong resonance, from states with well-tuned economies to those which are struggling at every stage to cut their budget deficit. A stable, well-coordinated economic policy across all 27 countries offers the chance of avoiding a major imbalance at EU level and of having a beneficial effect in the second stage. The EU's actions are intended to provide solutions to the crisis-related problems and be creative in order to restore stability in Member States. In other words, they are meant to eliminate the deficit, prevent disparities, while also consolidating the economy.

Sophie Briard Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Like my fellow Members from the three main political groups in the European Parliament, I have just approved the appointment of the College of European Commissioners presented by Mr Barroso. It is, in fact, a fine team bringing together individuals with varied and complementary backgrounds. Until 2014, Christian-Democrats, liberals and socialists will leave their political and geographical differences aside and work together within a College to serve the European general interest. For three weeks, the MEPs did a remarkable job of monitoring the quality of the candidates through the parliamentary hearing procedure. At the end of this period, it was our duty to give our full support to this new team. We now expect this 'Barroso II' Commission to surprise us with its unfailing determination to advance the European Union. Its main task will be to demonstrate each day the added value of the European project to all our fellow European citizens.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) In the critical period through which Europe is passing, in financial, economic and social terms, it is crucial to have a strong Commission with an ambitious, bold programme in key areas such as energy security and climate change, scientific research and innovation.

The new structure of the Commission, with one portfolio exclusively for Climate Change and another that combines Innovation and Research, gives clear evidence of an ambitious project and a credible strategy for Europe through to 2020.

This new Commission, under the leadership of President Barroso and with a new structure for those areas, meets the necessary criteria to be the engine of economic recovery, based on efficient use of resources and on innovation, having greater social justice as its objective.

I welcome the new College of Commissioners and President Barroso and congratulate them on the result of this election. It represents broader parliamentary support compared to the preceding Commission, and gives a clear signal of encouragement for the new institutional cooperation between Parliament and the Commission, so that they can speak more and more with a single voice in an EU which is a leader at world level.

Françoise Castex (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against this Commission, as did all the French Members of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. The majority of the commissioners represent the liberal stance of the European Union that we reject. There are others, nominated by their Member State, who do not have any ambitions for Europe, or any personal vision. One thing is for sure: the future commissioners did not commit themselves on any one of the points that we consider essential. What strategy will get us out of the crisis? How should we respond to the social and climate emergency? How should we revive the European project? Having failed to receive sufficient answers to these questions, we have voted against, because we cannot give a blank cheque to the European Commission. I do not believe that, if it fails to meet these objectives, this Commission can offer a new future to European citizens or secure a place for Europe in the world. On that basis, it cannot have our support. Of course, I am now going to have to work for five years on the proposals of this Commission. My vote today is an expression of my mistrust and of the political vigilance that I will demonstrate throughout this term of office.

Nessa Childers (S&D), *in writing*. – Along with my political group, the Socialists and Democrats, I was very pleased with the final make-up of the incoming Commission. In particular, the Environment and Energy

Commissioners will be pivotal to the development of Europe in the coming years, and I am satisfied that President Barroso has chosen the correct representatives.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) I voted against the proposed Commissioners (College), because they will apply the same, neoliberal policies which drove the European Union into this multi-faceted crisis and huge inequalities. They will promote the Treaty of Lisbon and the EU 2020 strategy, which will strengthen the sovereignty of the markets, increase unemployment and insecure jobs, unravel the social security system and restrict democratic and social rights. Obscure procedures and the democratic deficit in the European Union are causing mistrust among the citizens and exacerbating the crisis of confidence in the European institutions, as recently expressed in the extremely poor turnout at the European elections. Continuing with this policy will scupper the expectations of European citizens. The European Left will oppose this policy through the European Parliament and by fighting side by side with the workers and social movements to realise the hopes of the young generation for a democratic, social, feminist, ecological and peace-loving Europe.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I compliment Dr Barroso not only on the excellent work that he did during his first period of office, but also on his deserved re-appointment for a new term at the head of the European Commission. I hope that Parliament and the Commission will be able to work in close cooperation and with full respect for the competences and prerogatives which each possesses, with the aim of establishing a Special Partnership between both institutions, such as that proposed by President Barroso in his political guidelines. I am confident that the President-elect of the Commission will honour the promises he has made to this Parliament, which should result in a revised Framework Agreement. Only in this way shall we be able to complete the integration of a Europe which has as its primary objective the defence of our citizens' rights.

The hearings of the Commissioners-designate are always important moments which reveal the depth of European democracy. Parliament exercised its competences and the process had dignity, incisiveness and transparency. I believe that the second Barroso Commission will be even stronger and better prepared in policy terms than the previous one. I hope that it will be cohesive and that all its members will be equal to their great responsibilities, at a time when everyone is longing for economic recovery and job creation.

Mário David (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The new Barroso Commission has been approved by the European Parliament by a large majority. Of course, I also voted in favour of it. And I did so not only in a conscious manner, but also in a committed and confident one. I did so because the new College of Commissioners, on the basis of their experience, has a much greater political capacity and offers guarantees that it will firmly and with determination confront the great challenges facing the European Union: the serious financial crisis which we are experiencing and its terrible social and economic effects, particularly unemployment; security and the fight against terrorism; the strengthening of Europe's role in the world, which means a Europe with an active common foreign and security policy; the fight against climate change; and the competitiveness of our economies in defence of our social model. The realistic and ambitious programme which José Manuel Barroso has presented and which our Parliament has endorsed can now, finally, be implemented, to the benefit of 500 million European citizens. I wish the very best of luck to the President of the European Commission and his team.

Marielle De Sarnez (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) In September, the Members from the MoDem party did not vote in favour of Mr Barroso's appointment as President of the Commission, his track record not being such as to recommend his re-election. Nor did they vote today for the College of Commissioners, as the lack of ambition shown by a number of its members during their hearings offered little hope of the strong Commission that the EU needs. Moreover, recent developments have sadly highlighted the inability of that team to get to grips with events. Doubts were first instilled in December, during the Copenhagen Summit, where Europe proved itself incapable of speaking with one voice. They were confirmed in January, when Baroness Ashton failed to visit Haiti to show European solidarity or to attend the Montreal donor conference, where her presence was required in order to coordinate EU aid and the aid of the Member States. Finally, there can be no more doubts now, in February, when Greece is being attacked by speculators without the Commission being able to present a credible rescue plan. For these reasons, the elected representatives of the MoDem party have not put their trust in the Barroso II Commission.

Martin Ehrenhauser (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) As a committed pro-European, I cannot give my approval to the new European Commission. It is based on non-transparent decisions in the national parties and government offices. The proposed EU commissioners are not independent political heavyweights, as rightly desired by younger citizens in particular. No criteria relating to specialised knowledge were applied in the selection process. The fact that there were four weeks between the nomination of the Austrian Commissioner,

Johannes Hahn, and the allocation of his portfolio is in itself evidence of this. Despite the EU's reform treaty, the Treaty of Lisbon, which is now in force, the European Parliament still cannot elect individual commissioners or express a lack of confidence in them. Political personalities like the French and Spanish European Commissioners will founder here. This European Commission does not stand for more democracy and an awakening; it is a continuation along the path that led us into the current crisis.

Göran Färm, Anna Hedh, Olle Ludvigsson, Marita Ulvskog and Åsa Westlund (S&D), in writing. – (SV) Last autumn, we voted against Mr Barroso, since he does not share our view of the importance of good working conditions, equality and the transition to a sustainable society. The vote today concerns the College of 26 Commissioners.

Before Mr Barroso was re-elected as President of the Commission, we made clear demands for a revision of the Posting of Workers Directive. Mr Barroso was forced to concede and acknowledged for the first time that there were problems with the rulings by the European Court of Justice in the Laval case, among others. He also promised to come back with a regulation for resolving the problems as soon as possible. This was a very significant change of position by the President of the Commission, but it was not sufficient for us to support his candidature.

Today, we will take a position on the overall group of commissioners and we hope that certain commissioners – who have been given key positions in order to deal with the jobs crisis, the regulation of the financial markets and the defence of fundamental trade union rights – will be able to make a difference. It is particularly positive that Mr Barnier and Mr Andor have clearly stated that there are problems with the European Court of Justice's interpretation of the Posting of Workers Directive. They were also clear that they are willing to start work on implementing the necessary changes to European legislation.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I welcome the fact that the Lisbon Treaty retains the possibility of each state keeping its own commissioner, an approach which is relevant if we want all shades of opinion in Europe to identify with the processes and projects which are produced by the Commission.

I regret some of the difficulties that occurred during the parliamentary hearings, which led to the withdrawal of one of the candidates, and I sincerely hope that such events become rarer.

In my judgment, the adopted method of subjecting the candidates for commissioner to parliamentary scrutiny is beneficial for the integration of Europe, as it allows for greater transparency in the debate and in the evaluation of the individuals' suitability for their intended posts, and I appeal for the hearings to take place in a demanding but cordial atmosphere, as the European Parliament and its Members should refrain from trying to turn the hearings into a spectacle of gratuitous insults and confrontation.

I hope the Commission will choose better legislation, will always bear in mind the need to properly respect the principle of subsidiarity and will, as a matter of priority, adopt a central policy role in tackling the economic crisis.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) In a crucial phase for the recovery of the economy, the experience and versatility of this Commission led by José Manuel Durão Barroso, as well as the manifest commitment, competence and recognition of the great European causes by the Commissioners who were heard in this Parliament, will be decisive in sustaining a united and socially equitable Europe, capable of assuming a leading role in the fight against climate change and reinforcing the competitiveness of our firms by backing scientific research and innovation.

I stress the renewed expectations of a team that accepts the great diversity of cultures and identities in Europe as enhancing the best values of each Member State. Regarding the new institutional relations created by the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon and in view of the challenges placed in the path of the development of contemporary societies, I believe that, with this Commission, the European Union has strengthened its capacity for intervention in the current economic, social and political framework, not only internally, but also at a global level.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Our vote against the European Commission is a natural result of our disagreement with respect to its programme, the majority of the positions upheld in the hearings that have taken place, and the objectives and content of the Treaty of Lisbon itself which the Commission promises to defend, but with which we disagree.

Whilst it is true that the European Commission is one of the most important institutional organs of the European Union, it is also true that the College of Commissioners is composed of commissioners nominated

by the Member States of the European Union. Since the majority of their governments are right-wing conservative or social-democrat with similar policies, it is not surprising that the European Commission is leaning in the same direction to deepen neoliberal, militaristic and federalist policies. In practical terms, therefore, we did not hear any responses to the serious economic and social problems which workers and citizens are facing.

We fight for another Europe, of justice and social progress, where economic and social cohesion are a reality and cooperation among states which are sovereign and have equal rights, as well as peace, are central objectives.

Robert Goebbels (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the new 'Barroso II' Commission. Since the European elections of June 2009, the European Union has been in a political vacuum, a vacuum made worse by the delayed entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. There is therefore an urgent need for the new Commission, as the only European institution with the power to initiate legislation, to become active. With the exception of Mrs Jeleva, who had to withdraw her candidature, the 26 commissioners who have been appointed have all individually received the support of the MEPs. It would have made no sense to reject the College. Consequently, the vote to appoint the Commission was a mere formality, an 'administrative yes'. By voting in favour of the Barroso II Commission, I do not intend to give it my unconditional political support. I shall judge the Commission on its political initiatives.

Sylvie Goulard (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) In spite of the presence, within the College, of several high-calibre individuals, I voted against the appointment of the Commission for two reasons. When it comes to economic and monetary issues (the Lisbon Strategy, supervision of the euro area), the failings of the previous Commission are well known. As regards the external representation of the EU, Baroness Ashton does not have the required skills and has not seemed intent on committing herself, as we have seen with the Haiti tragedy. She was part of the Blair government which invaded Iraq in violation of international law and which negotiated an opt-out on the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Mathieu Grosch (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) I have voted in favour of this Commission, because overall it has shown – particularly with the (new) appointments – that it can carry out the work successfully. The outcome of the negotiations between the Commission and Parliament is also satisfactory. I think it is particularly important that the Commission does not receive a carte blanche for the next five years, but is to be subject to a form of ongoing assessment.

There remains a particular challenge to bring coherence to the policies in the different areas, for example, the environment and social and economic affairs, and to formulate our communication with the outside world in such a way as to make European policy more transparent and comprehensible for all citizens.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against Mr Barroso's Commission because it fails to meet my requirements in terms of promoting the social reforms that we must have if we are to emerge from the crisis in which we find ourselves. It is clear that this Commission will by no means represent a proactive force for a strong political Europe and that it is poles apart from the Europe that I am so anxious to see. With ill-defined portfolios and weakened powers, this Commission will lack the means to act and will certainly be more inclined to preserve national interests than the European interest.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the new College of Commissioners. From the viewpoint of Scotland, the nation which I represent, there are significant issues and challenges for the new Commissioners to address. With reform of the CFP and the CAP on the horizon, Scotland's key interests in these policies must be recognised and I call upon the Commissioners concerned to ensure that Scotland's coastal and rural communities are allowed to flourish socially and economically. Scotland being a major potential source of energy production, especially in renewable sources, the Commission should prioritise projects and initiatives which will assist in developing Scotland's massive potential as a supplier of clean green energy.

As a member of a pro-EU Party, I hope that this Commission can recover some of the faith in the EU which has been lost by many Scots, for example, as a direct result of Scotland's experiences of the failed Common Fisheries Policy.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) The Barroso Commission Mark II will be the first to operate under the Treaty of Lisbon, with the European Parliament enjoying extended powers, making it a more visible and active partner than ever. Based on the outcome of the vote, we have appointed a College of Commissioners whose overall performance did not really go without a hitch, as in the case of the commissioner nominated

by Bulgaria and her subsequent replacement, which highlight this point. The fact that we have successfully achieved this task of changing the College's composition is actually a success for the European Parliament in general and for our political group in particular. However, I believe that a vote for this College is the most appropriate option at a time when any delay in making this decision could have put the EU in an uncomfortable situation where accusations of inefficiency would have been justified. What is important is for the new Commission to get down to work as quickly as possible and catch the European Parliament up, which has already been elected for seven months, at least in terms of the work which has been done. We can only hope for good cooperation where the objectives and action plans take on a more concrete form than that presented during the hearings.

Danuta Jazłowiecka (PPE). – (PL) I abstained from voting on the composition of the European Commission, because alongside the good candidates, there were many weak and very weak ones. It is unacceptable to me to consent to people being put forward for the positions of head of European diplomacy, Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs and Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs who are not qualified to hold these positions. We should remember that we are still in a crisis, and we are still looking for a way out of the crisis. Europe cannot, therefore, afford to have Commissioners who are only now going to learn their portfolios. I am astonished by the attitude of the President of the European Commission, who, after serving a five-year term of office and having such large experience in leading the Commission, has proposed such weak candidates. Quite honestly, I should have voted against the proposed make-up of the Commission, but alongside the weak candidates there were also several very good ones – including the Polish candidate, Janusz Lewandowski. In spite of my abstention, I wish the entire Commission nothing but success, because this is so important for all Europeans.

Tunne Kelam (PPE), in writing. – I voted in favour of the College of Commissioners, expressing my trust in the President of the Commission most of all. I do not consider the composition of the Commission to be ideal. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs continuously poses a problem for me, as she does not have the necessary experience in foreign affairs and she lacks a clear vision on how to lead the EU's foreign and security policy. Nevertheless, I find it crucial that the Commission start working in its full mandate and I consider the wide support of the European Parliament in this very important as, in my opinion, the Commission and the European Parliament are the closest allies in shaping the EU's common policies.

Alan Kelly (S&D), in writing. – We all wish this new Commission well. Their priorities are many but there is no doubt of the one area that we all agree on is for the need to create jobs. This should be the major pillar on which this new Commission is judged. Let's be frank about it; many of the Member States have or are facing economic collapse. Reversing this situation and developing a smart, social market economy where the EU is a global leader across all fields of economic life will be the measure of this Commission. It is my hope particularly that the Irish Commissioner, Ms Geogheghan Quinn, takes a leading role in the new commission with her innovation and research portfolio. She will play a critical role in Europe's recovery and I wish her well with this.

Morten Løkkegaard (ALDE), in writing. – (DA) Mr President, many fine words have been spoken regarding Mr Barroso's new team of commissioners – and rightly so.

I speak now because it is necessary to draw attention to a major mistake that has been made in connection with the new Commission: one may look in vain for the position of Commissioner for Communication. It has quite simply been DISCONTINUED – and that at a time when – more than ever – we need a proper, coordinated, well thought-out communication policy within the EU.

A couple of weeks ago, I sent Mr Barroso a letter on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe expressing our concern and asking WHY we no longer have a Commissioner for Communication.

No reply has ever been received – which is perhaps a kind of answer in itself, if not a satisfactory one.

It thus seems that no one is sure why the EU does not have a commissioner for what is an incredibly important – in fact, quite crucial – area if the many great speeches about getting closer to the EU's citizens and creating a common European public space are to be anything more than just fine words.

I am still waiting for an answer from Mr Barroso – preferably an answer with a proper plan for communication in the forthcoming five years.

Isabella Lövin (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I share the critics on the procedure of the nomination of the Commission, as explained in the resolution of the Green Group, particularly the lack of transparency, Member States choosing their candidates rather according to domestic political considerations than for their suitability, and the lack of possibility to disapprove to a separate candidate. However, I could not vote against the whole Commission since the Commissioners-designate for absolutely crucial and key issues such as climate, environment, development, humanitarian aid, agriculture and fisheries were all regarded as very competent and committed. Therefore, I abstained on the vote on the new Commission.

Thomas Mann (PPE), in writing. – (DE) I have just approved the election of the European Commission, although this was not an easy decision. The reason for this is that, during the hearing, it emerged that some of the candidates proposed by the Member States did not have adequate specialised knowledge, nor were they in a position to develop concrete ideas about their portfolios or, indeed, any vision for the future at all. The Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the Commission on their future cooperation also leaves many questions unanswered. It is currently merely a European Parliament wish list, with no obligation. In specific negotiations, it will now need to be specified in detail the extent to which our rights as representatives of the people were able to be significantly strengthened through the Treaty of Lisbon. However, the interinstitutional agreement does contain some important steps in the right direction. The impact of all measures taken by the Commission is to be assessed regularly by an independent party. Parliament will be informed at an early stage of staffing changes in the Commission. The Chair of Parliament's delegation will be granted observer status at international conferences. The European Parliament will be entitled to be involved in preparing and implementing the Annual Work Programme of the EU. Finally, the European Commission will undertake to submit a report on its legislative initiatives within three months. I have therefore voted 'yes' today to the new Barroso Commission.

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE), in writing. – (PL) A vote in favour of the European Commission is, on my part, an expression of the credit of trust and hope that I place in Mr Barroso's newly-elected cabinet. I think that, despite much controversy and the probability that some of the Commissioners lack experience, we should enable the European Commission to get to grips with issues which arise. It is only by active involvement and getting down to some real work that the Commissioners will be able to demonstrate their real value. I hope the new cabinet, with the close cooperation of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament, and with effective control, will show that my vote was right.

David Martin (S&D), in writing. – I welcome the appointment of the new Commission, and look forward to seeing the Commission delivering on the promises made. I am particularly pleased at the confirmation of Cathy Ashton as High Representative, and am sure that her quiet diplomacy will be of benefit to Europe as a whole.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (FR) The Barroso II Commission, as the election of its President showed, is a continuation of the previous Commissions, the neoliberal policies of which led the EU into a situation of long-term economic, social and environmental crisis that is henceforth its own. Neither the programme presented by Mr Barroso nor the nominations of the commissioners point to any change in the Commission's policy objectives.

Lying somewhere between the continuation of the worst possible situation and its decline, the Barroso II Commission embodies a Europe that has been reduced to social destruction and to the Atlanticism beloved of the neoliberal elites, a Europe that refuses to break with the neoliberal dogma of focusing exclusively on profits, which is destroying the people and the planet. My job as an MEP is to build the Europe of equal wealth distribution and of environmental planning that the peoples need. I shall therefore vote against a Commission that is the antithesis of this.

Nuno Melo (PPE), in writing. – (PT) After several weeks of hearings with the new Commissioners, this would not be an appropriate time to call into question the quality of a College of Commissioners which has, over many hours in various committees, already provided very useful clarifications about the policies to be adopted.

Therefore, now is the time to provide the EU with a legitimate Commission which is capable of responding to the difficult events of recent times. This replicates here the tenor of the explanation of vote submitted with respect to the motions for resolutions B7-0071/2010, B7-0088/2010 and B7-0089/2010. The undersigned particularly welcomes the fact that the European Union is now better equipped to confront the problems of the present and challenges of the future.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) As a staunch European, and following the adoption of the Framework Agreement between the European Commission and the European Parliament for the next five years, I gave my support to the appointment of the new European Commission, as did the majority of my colleagues from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats). The outcome of the vote is clear: 488 of my fellow Members joined me in endorsing the appointment of the College of the European Commission. I would point out that this is the first time in European history that we have appointed the European Commission in our capacity as a true colegislator. In a Europe shaken by the crisis, and with the new institutional set-up, we need ambition and a major unifying project in order to establish a stronger Europe for European citizens. Therefore, I call strongly for the European Commission to begin taking action without delay.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the Barroso Commission Mark II for two reasons. The first reason is that it has put forward a credible and realistic programme which I regard as being appropriate for the current needs. I hope that the new College will proceed with implementing this programme as soon as possible. The second reason is that Mr Barroso's team is made up of many reliable professionals who, I firmly believe, will make a significant contribution to the success of the reforms which we need in the coming years.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) The Polish delegation of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament voted in favour of extending a vote of confidence to the new European Commission. We are, however, conscious of the weak sides of the newly-appointed Commission and of the reservations expressed over the competence of some Commissioners. We have had to wait a long time for the new European Commission. It should, however, be admitted that the new Commission did receive the overwhelming majority of the votes. This is a strong mandate for the future. However, on the other hand, hardly anyone voted for the new Commission without some reservations. One problem certainly is the fact that, with 27 Commissioners, their portfolios often overlap, which is not a very clear situation.

Many fellow Members point, too, to the problem of the excessive control of particular Commissioners by Mr Barroso. We welcome the fact that the new Commission will carry out an assessment of the social and economic effects of the financial crisis. I note with great disappointment, however, the fact that in Mr Barroso's speech, there was no specific information about reform of the common agricultural policy or cohesion policy. These areas will certainly be among the most important areas of work in the coming term of the European Commission.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) The citizens and institutions of all EU Member States should be keen for the best and the strongest candidates to become Commissioners. The responsibility is great, both for those countries putting candidates forward and for Members of the European Parliament. Unfortunately, some states are not guided by this attitude. The impression is given that sometimes, the governments of EU Member States send weak or 'undesirable' politicians to Brussels to free up a position in their capitals. This is a dangerous tendency. However, the European Parliament is attempting to show a 'red card' to weak candidates, who have received both a posting from their governments, and the approval of Commission President Barroso, or those whose financial interests lack transparency. Five years ago, two candidates failed, this year one. However, as yet, MEPs do not have the right to vote for individual Commissioners, we vote for the College of Commissioners. As the majority of Commissioner candidates made a good impression, I voted in favour of the new European Commission.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Europe has urgent need of an authoritative leader, which this Commission embodies completely.

The new Commission will have the difficult task of encouraging sustainable growth through the full implementation of the European economic model; that is, the model of the social market economy.

The strengthening of the internal market must provide the key to maintaining healthy competition, with the aim of encouraging job creation and growth. I am particularly proud of the fact that in the new European executive, Italy is providing, in the person of Mr Tajani, continuity of merit and competence by being awarded one of the key portfolios, namely that of industry, which is of strategic importance in managing the crisis and in the reorganisation of European production.

During the course of this next mandate, the Commission must set itself precise priorities, and be capable of giving a European face to immigration policy and energy policy, thus providing the Union with a consistent

approach that is currently proving difficult to attain. It will also have to be able to provide the European Union with a foreign and defence policy worthy of that name.

Teresa Riera Madurell (S&D), in writing. – (ES) The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy is responsible for research, energy and developing the information society. These are three priorities in terms of emerging from the crisis and regenerating our production system, which my Group, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, wants to be more competitive and innovative, but also more socially and environmentally sustainable. Research and innovation are major driving forces for change. Mr Barroso committed to 3% investment in research and development. However, we were concerned to see how this area gradually became less of a priority in terms of political timetables and budgets. The Commission has made a clearer commitment in this regard. Economic recovery will largely come as a result of changing our energy model. The future of the economy is the future of the green economy. The Commission has also reaffirmed this goal. With regard to the information society, we agree on the many challenges that we face in order to guarantee access to information and communication technologies for everyone everywhere. The Commissioners that attended our Committee made significant, specific commitments, and we have given them a vote of confidence, but we guarantee that we will ensure that those commitments are fulfilled.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) I voted 'no' to the question of whether we consider Barroso II suitable as a motor, initiator and inspirer of the European project. Barroso is not the powerful leader we need. He allowed five extremely crucial years to pass by. Years in which the EU could have pursued a less neoliberal and a more social policy. Years in which Europe could have promoted SMEs. Years in which he could have helped support the quality of European, independent media and could have helped democratise European decision making in order to give millions of citizens more confidence again in the European cooperation project. None of this happened.

By blindly focusing on liberalisation, high stock market prices and macro-economic growth, the social and sustainable face of the EU became foggy. The world is being ravaged by three crises: a financial-economic one, a social one and an environmental one. A lack of a collective response is feeding public cynicism and political nihilism. Barroso's weak and vague policy plan gives little hope for change. He accepted that Member States sometimes push entirely incapable candidates to the fore and he split the portfolios of some commissioners up, resulting in uncertainty about who is now actually responsible for crucial policy areas. Barroso lacks vision and political boldness, and this does Europe no favours. That explains my 'No' vote.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), in writing. – (PT) Parliament and the Commission will confront key issues for the European Union, namely the reversal of the crisis by means of the recovery of the economy and employment, the balancing of the public finances of the Member States and the negotiation of the financial framework for the post-2013 period, regarding which I would emphasise the importance of the cohesion policy. I had the opportunity to question the Commissioner-designate for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, with regard to his interest in the creation of a specific programme of permanent financial support for the outermost regions. I also presented him with a proposal for a more flexible system of eligibility for receipt of structural funds for 'transition' regions, i.e. those which find themselves caught between the objectives of 'convergence' and 'competitiveness and employment'. As well as displaying competence and rigour, the Commissioner-designate showed he was prepared to examine these possibilities, which gives me confidence in his future willingness and sensitivity towards outermost regions such as Madeira. I gave my vote of confidence to this team of Commissioners, which will be led by José Manuel Barroso, as in general, they have shown good technical preparation, seriousness and ambition to be able to respond to the challenges of the EU without forgetting the values which underpin its creation, namely solidarity and territorial cohesion.

Róza Gräfin Von Thun Und Hohenstein (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I voted in favour of appointment of the Commission, although in the case of several commissioners I would gladly have expressed a separate opinion. As we all know, the European Parliament votes only on the composition of the entire Commission. Despite the fact that I cannot say I am delighted with the choice of Baroness Ashton, the College of Commissioners is dominated by extremely competent and experienced people. The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), to which I belong, decided to endorse the Commission, to enable the European Union to work efficiently. If I had voted against appointment of the Commission it would have been a demonstration and could have been seen as a lack of loyalty towards my group, but it would not have affected Parliament's decision. Mr Barroso's new Commission includes experienced and wise politicians such as Mr Barnier and Mrs Reding, with whom I am going to work closely. Mr Lewandowski, who is responsible for the budget, will certainly be an excellent commissioner, too. We can be truly proud. The European Parliament was also able to influence Bulgaria, which replaced Mrs Jeleva, who was not very well qualified in the field of

humanitarian aid and development, with Mrs Georgieva. I consider this to be a great success and a constructive contribution of the European Parliament to the creation of the new Commission. Making sound suggestions and having an indirect influence on Mr Barroso and Member States is, I think, the most effective way we can work, today. Voting against the Commission would have prolonged the expensive negotiations, and the final effect would not necessarily have been better than the one which we have achieved.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The members of the European Commission have the vote of confidence of the political representatives of capital, but not of the workers. The members of the European Commission were appointed by the neoliberal and social-democrat governments of the Member States of the EU and the vote of the European Parliament, the sole political criterion for their election being their ability to serve the interests of capital without hindrance. The members of the European Commission took pains to confirm this during the hearings in the European Parliament's committees by unhesitatingly supporting: the imperialist nature of the EU, the strength of its anti-grassroots policy and its military interventions at international level, in order to promote the profitability of capital; their dedication to the completion of the single market and the four Maastricht freedoms, competitiveness and capitalist restructurings, in order to put suitable conditions in place for the concentration of capital; the stepping-up of anti-grassroots measures in an all-out attack on the workers' labour, wage, social and insurance rights, in order to increase the profits of the monopolies; an increase in and the strengthening of reactionary prosecuting tools, in order to repress workers' and grassroots demonstrations. The MEPs of the Greek Communist Party voted against the European Commission, which will maintain and intensify the policy of exploitation of the workers, poor farmers and the self-employed.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), in writing. – We want a pragmatic European Commission that will push through reform, including deregulation and reductions in EU expenditure, focusing on managerial issues rather than political integration. While some of the nominated Commissioners are competent, others are not. The post of High Representative is a product of the Lisbon Treaty. I do not approve of that treaty or its creations. It has no democratic legitimacy. Baroness Ashton was chosen through a back-room deal among Europe's socialist parties, an afterthought by the British Prime Minister. Besides having no experience of the required tasks, she has a highly dubious past as National Treasurer of CND. This subversive organisation sought to disarm Britain unilaterally at the height of the Cold War, and spread alarm and despondency. There are many nominees with Communist backgrounds. Some nominees, such as László Andor, demonstrated little understanding of their portfolios and seemed inclined to impose more and more unhelpful regulation. It is quite wrong that Parliament cannot vote on individual Commissioners but must vote on the College as a whole. While I could approve some individuals, others I would vote against. In the interests of the solidarity of our group, I abstained.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), in writing. – (DE) Mr Barroso, the pragmatic reason for voting 'yes' to the Commission-designate is simply that the work that needs to be done can now finally be started. This will save valuable taxpayers' money. Mr Barroso, you have shown skill in electing the Commission. Some of the Commissioners-designate are excellent. There are also some who definitely have the potential to develop. They should be given the opportunity, as they wish, to familiarise themselves with Europe's challenges. However, there are some Commissioners-designate who leave something to be desired, do not seem to possess the specialised knowledge and seem to lack the necessary ambition to occupy the top positions in Europe.

For these reasons, I have rejected the proposal for the Commission-designate made up in this way. I would like to see commissioners appointed in a much more transparent way – and I would like better qualified female commissioners to be found.

Anna Záborská (PPE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution and, hence, of the new European Commission. The European Parliament is not giving a blank cheque to Mr Barroso and the College of Commissioners. However, I met with President Barroso on a very regular basis throughout his first term of office when I oversaw, during the same period, the work of Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. I was therefore able to observe his sensitive approach to managing the work of the European Commission and the respect he shows for his fellow human beings and for the common good. I am also very pleased for the Slovak candidate, who was exposed to unfair attacks born of ignorance and carried out for nothing other than petty political reasons. When slander and minorities are used, by means of a smear campaign, to question the integrity of a political figure for petty political reasons, it marks the beginning of the end of the institutional political culture. I genuinely wish all the members of the European Commission well in their efforts to do an excellent job.

8. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 14.40 and resumed at 15.00)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

9. Approval of the minutes of the previous sitting: see Minutes

10. Difficult monetary, economic and social situation of Eurozone countries (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the difficult monetary, economic and social situation of eurozone countries.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, we are in an unprecedented situation in the euro area, because this is the first global financial crisis since the euro has been in existence. What is happening in the euro area and in the whole of the European Union is that although it did not cause the crisis and it is not where the crisis began – we know that it began in the United States – we have suffered its effects just as much as the country where it began.

Obviously, the situation of public deficits has arisen as a result of the crisis and of positive action by governments to prevent, among other things, the collapse of the financial system. These deficits inevitably mean that governments have less room for manoeuvre in terms of their budgetary policies.

The debate concerns the economic situation, the monetary situation and the social situation. Regarding the economic situation, it must be said that the euro area as a whole has now come out of the recession and it has also avoided the risk of deflation, although there are obvious disparities in the rates of growth and growth is still not entirely sustained. We need to ensure that growth is sustained and consolidated, which is a fundamental objective of economic policy throughout the euro area, but we are no longer in a recession. The euro area as a whole is no longer in recession.

It is, however, true that job creation is falling behind. This year, there will still be severe unemployment throughout the euro area, but we are on the right path towards growth. In fact, this is one of the matters that is going to be dealt with in the informal meeting of the European Council on Thursday: the importance of growth in order to return to sustained growth, maintain the European social model and begin to create jobs once again, good-quality jobs.

Regarding the monetary system, despite the fact that there is tension in the securities markets, the European Union and its institutions have acted correctly. The European Central Bank has done its job well and is continuing to do so by gauging the strategies for bringing us out of the crisis. It is therefore reasonable for the stimuli not to be abandoned during 2010. In fact, the European Central Bank is gradually phasing out those stimuli, and is already removing some of the measures that it adopted. An example of this is removing the cash advantages granted to banks, which has been possible because the credit markets have gradually returned to normal.

It should also be pointed out that the Eurogroup and Ecofin have managed the crisis well, and have also created a supervision structure for the financial system that is going to be debated in this House. We hope that this will be one of the central elements of the political debate during the term of the Spanish Presidency.

Regarding the social situation, we are obviously suffering the consequences of high unemployment throughout the euro area. Although there are also disparities in unemployment levels across the euro area, it is undoubtedly the main issue for Europeans at the moment. They want employment, they want a return to growth, which will create employment. Not the volatile, precarious employment that may have existed in some countries of the euro area, but good-quality employment.

Among other things, it should also be pointed out that it was obviously high unemployment that triggered the 'automatic stabilisers', which resulted in unemployment aid and subsidies. In turn, these influenced the deficits that the Member States have as a result of our political and social system, which protects those in the most vulnerable situations, such as those who lose their jobs.

In the future – and this is another subject that will be dealt with on Thursday at the informal European Council meeting – there will have to be a policy of employability, which we call ‘Europe 2020’, as a model of growth and creating quality jobs.

To conclude, Madam President, I believe that in this case, it has been demonstrated that it has been absolutely vital to coordinate and strengthen the euro area and that it continues to be a place where there is significant monetary and economic protection. It has been demonstrated that the euro area needs to be strengthened and that it will be possible to expand it when there are countries that can meet the requirements, but that expansion is also a positive thing.

Also – and I will now conclude – it is essential that we move towards integration and economic convergence in the European Union. There are still disparities between the economic positions in the Union. We need to move from monetary union towards true economic union, as stated in the treaties. The treaties talked about economic and monetary union, and it was described as such, but monetary union was implemented before economic union.

The coordination of economic, employment and social policies is laid down in the treaties. It is an obligation and it is one of the principles, one of the lines or ideas raised by the Spanish Presidency. Coordinated public policies have been effective when they have truly been coordinated. This was the case when the European Economic Recovery Plan was made, when fiscal policies were implemented around maintaining the credibility of the Stability and Growth Pact, which was vital. It was also the case when coordinated financial policies were undertaken, for example, bank guarantees and increasing deposit guarantee funds. In short, it is about what economists call ‘economies of scale’ also being done at a political level, because at a political level, significant coordination produces good results.

This is the Council’s vision of this difficult situation, but we are coming out of it and we need to emerge from it much more strongly and solidly. This will undoubtedly be one of the central objectives of the informal meeting of the European Council on Thursday:

Joaquín Almunia, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Madam President, the Commission is concerned about the substantial economic and fiscal challenges that Greece faces. The difficult situation in Greece is a matter of common concern for the euro area and for the EU as a whole, as large and persistent domestic external imbalances threaten the macro-financial stability of the country with a serious risk of spillovers into other parts of the euro area.

The Greek authorities and the Greek people are aware of the challenge in front of them. On 15 January, the government presented an ambitious stability programme intended to tackle these issues. The programme envisages a deficit reduction from an estimated 12.7% in 2009 to below 3% in 2012, starting with an adjustment of four points of GDP this year. This programme displays an appropriate degree of ambition given the sheer size of the consolidation needed and is a front-loaded programme. In more detail, the Greek authorities have announced a package of concrete measures for 2010. Some of these measures have already been submitted to the Greek Parliament and are to be implemented shortly. Plans for the later years of the programme are less detailed at this stage.

Last week, on 3 February, the Commission adopted an integrated approach and surveillance mechanism which combines our assessment of the stability programme, a recommendation on the excessive deficit procedure to bring the budget deficit below 3% in 2012, as the government established in the programme, and another recommendation using Article 121(4) of the EU Treaty for the first time to ensure that Greece’s economic policies are consistent with our broad economic policy guidelines and with the proper functioning of our Economic and Monetary Union. We have also started an infringement procedure to ensure that Greece addresses the problems that have prevented the reporting of reliable budgetary statistics until now and the Commission announced its immediate initiative on audit powers for Eurostat.

As regards the stability programme, the Commission fully supports Greece in its efforts to redress a difficult economic and fiscal situation. The measures and policy intentions outlined in this programme are an important step in the right direction. The successful large government bond issue on 25 January seems to indicate that market participants share this view, albeit at a high interest premium, and increases in the spreads thereafter also show that they remain cautious.

However, there are risks to the programme targets and the medium-term fiscal adjustment. The macro-economic scenario outlined in the programme is rather optimistic and there is some uncertainty about the underlying revenue projections, especially the estimated impact of efforts to tackle tax evasion

during an economic downturn. Given recent market developments, interest and expenditure projections also seem to be on the low side. As far as the recommendation on the excessive deficit procedure is concerned, our recommendations as regard measures to be taken this year rely fully on the measures announced by the Greek authorities in their stability programme. They include measures to be implemented in the first quarter of this year, such as wage bill cuts, reduction in public employment, progress with health care and pension reforms, tax and excise duties increases and tax administration reform. Some of the fiscal consolidation measures have already been submitted to the Greek Parliament and should be implemented shortly. The Greek authorities are invited by the Commission in our proposal to the Council to present by mid-March a detailed implementation report announcing adopted measures and the calendar of the announced measures. An evaluation of the risks should also be carried out so that, in case risks materialise, compensatory measures should be put in place as necessary.

In this context, the Commission welcomes the announcement on 2 February of further measures, notably a nominal public sector wage freeze and an increase in excise duties on fuels to safeguard the budgetary target for this year, as well as the Greek authorities' readiness to adopt and swiftly implement additional measures if needed.

As regards the later years of the programme, we call for further adjustments of a permanent nature, continued tax administration reforms and an improvement in the budgetary framework. Obviously, Greece is also requested to further pursue efforts to improve the collection and processing of general government aid. Given that plans are less detailed, we propose setting up a tight reporting system in which the Greek authorities will report on a quarterly basis on measures implemented, results achieved and measures to be implemented. This tight reporting system will ensure that the plans will materialise as planned. We also adopted the recommendation to put an end to the inconsistency with the broad guidelines of the economic policies and the risks of jeopardising the proper functioning of economic and monetary union, given the continuous loss of competitiveness of the Greek economy, and the widening of external imbalances as well as by the large spread in financial markets vis-à-vis benchmark bonds.

Moreover, co-movements in spreads in other countries are also evidence of clear risks of spillovers to other Member States. In this context, Greece is expected to adopt a comprehensive structural reform programme aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the public administration, stepping up pension and health care reform, improving labour-market functioning and the effectiveness of the wage bargaining system, enhancing product market functioning and the business environment and maintaining banking and financial sector stability.

What are the next steps in this very detailed process of surveillance? Our recommendations will be discussed by the Eurogroup and Ecofin next week, and then a first report should come in mid-March elaborating on the calendar for implementation to safeguard the 2010 targets. Then, on a quarterly basis, starting in May, Greece should report on the way in which they are responding to the Council decision and recommendation. Each report will be subject to a Commission assessment. It is clear that, if there are signs that risks are materialising, additional measures would need to be implemented. Therefore, it is crucial that the Greek Government stands ready to adopt additional measures if necessary, as they have already indicated.

In conclusion, we are living in an unprecedented situation but we are facing it. Greece has adopted an ambitious programme to correct its deficit and to reform its public administration and its economy. It deserves support in this difficult task, and the Commission supports Greece. The integrated surveillance mechanism, together with the willingness of the authorities to tackle the problems, is the guardian of a successful implementation of fiscal consolidation measures and structural reforms that will put Greece back on a sustainable path. Timely and rigorous implementation of the budgetary measures and of structural reforms – and both fiscal measures and structural reforms are contained in the programme adopted in Greece by the Greek authorities – together with the tight monitoring of the situation, is the key to finding an adequate solution to the present tensions in our markets.

Corien Wortmann-Kool, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (NL) The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) has taken the initiative for this debate because the problems in the euro area countries make a strong European approach very urgent. That is what we are concerned about.

In recent years, Member States have too often distanced themselves from the Stability and Growth Pact. That is why I call on the Council today, and not only where Greece is concerned, to commit itself more widely and fully to much stronger coordination of monetary policy at the informal summit meeting this coming Thursday and at the Ecofin meeting next week.

The Spanish Presidency can also set a good example in its own country, because the situation there is also urgent.

Mr President, on behalf of my group, I would like to offer my heartfelt support to the way in which the European Commission is dealing with Greece. Admittedly it is months too late, but it is absolutely necessary. The same must also apply to other countries in the danger zone. The solution lies not in providing more money from the European budget, but in actually implementing the reform plans.

I hope that you are also working on an emergency scenario, should one be necessary, and are therefore investigating all options, including cooperating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). At the same time, we must keep a cool head because, given the extent of the budget problem, the reactions on the financial markets are seriously exaggerated. This underscores the urgent need to quickly strengthen European regulation of the financial markets.

Udo Bullmann, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Mr Almunia, during this transition period in particular, I thank you for your commitment to your previous mandate and I wish you luck in your new role. I would also like to extend this wish to your successor, Mr Rehn. I wish him courage and luck for the important tasks he is taking on.

There are three things we can learn from the present situation. The first is that what Mr Barroso has presented to us as Europe 2020 is lacking in substance. It is a long way from being sufficient to create the coherence in the European Union that we urgently need in order to prevent the situation that we are currently facing from occurring again in the future. This strategy needs substance, and I hope that the scheduled milestones in the next few weeks will provide the opportunity to improve on it. We urgently need better coordination of economic policy. The Spanish Presidency is right to emphasise this. The Presidency should not allow itself to be intimidated in this regard.

The second thing we can learn from the current situation is that some Member States are, of course, in need of modernisation and the figures are surely correct in this regard. However, there is a need for modernisation in more than one country. There are also countries that have to do more, because they are able to do more. I have no doubt that the new Greek Finance Minister, Mr Papakonstantinou, will do an excellent job and I do not know any sincere politicians who would dispute that. He deserves our trust and we should give him our support.

The third thing we can learn is that the European Union must be armed. If the markets put the euro area to the test, then Europe must be in a position to respond to this and it must be possible for the response to be unconventional. If there is further speculation against individual countries, we must be in a position to make credit available under average European rating terms. That will need to be organised. We can find support for this kind of action in the Treaty of Lisbon. I would say to the Council and the Commission: be prepared for the need to negotiate.

Guy Verhofstadt, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (NL) I think that, in contrast to the representatives of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), I am not really an advocate of the intervention by the Commission.

First and foremost, I think we must recognise that what we are witnessing with Greece is also the consequence of the failure of the Lisbon Strategy. The countries have actually grown apart from each other in the last ten years. The difference between Germany and Greece has not lessened over the past decade, but increased, and this is a consequence of the fact that we have pursued a Lisbon Strategy that was much too weak.

Secondly, I also think that a tactical, strategic error has been made by the European institutions – the European Commission and the European Central Bank – by not taking immediate action. Action was taken far too late. For six weeks, all sorts of declarations were made by European leaders, who stated that the Greek leaders had to take measures, that the measures were not strong enough, or even that they had no confidence in the ability of the Greek leaders, and so forth. We have heard it all. I say to you that we, ourselves, are partly responsible for the reaction of the financial markets with respect to Greece. How can you now expect the financial markets to have confidence in a club if the members of the club themselves no longer have confidence in Greece and in the measures being proposed by Greece? I therefore think that the approach has been wrong. If the European Central Bank and the European Commission had created a package for Greece much more quickly from the outset, we would not have had any infection of the euro area of the type we are currently witnessing.

Neither should it be said that nobody was aware of Greece's problems. People have been talking about the Greek issue in the lobbies of the European Commission for three or four months and have been saying that there would be a problem with Greece at some point. That is indeed the only reason, ladies and gentlemen, that explains why there is a rate on Greece, with its 12.7% deficit, while there is no rate on the United Kingdom, with its 12.9% deficit. Therefore, this no longer really concerns the bare figures; it concerns the financial markets which, due to the fact that we, ourselves, are not exuding sufficient cohesion, confidence and solidarity, are pouncing on Greece. This situation could have been avoided by a very strong intervention by the European Commission and the European Central Bank.

A strategy or a recommendation, Commissioner: let us solve this ourselves! I am absolutely against the fact that we are bringing in the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, to solve problems in the euro area. We will solve the problems in the euro area ourselves, so we do not need the IMF.

Finally, my last point, which is about more than Greece. The present situation is a test case for the cohesion and internal unity of the euro.

Pascal Canfin, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, I would like to tell the Spanish Presidency that we fully support its analysis of the political will to progress towards new tools of governance and towards an economic union, and not just a monetary union, as Mr Bullmann also pointed out. You will have our political group's full support in this undertaking.

In actual fact, leaving aside the Greek case, which is at stake, I believe that we need to review all the tools of economic governance of the euro area and, in particular, the Stability and Growth Pact. More than half of the Member States in the euro area no longer adhere to the Stability and Growth Pact.

Moreover, let us not forget that, until fairly recently – until the crisis – Spain was fully compliant with the Stability and Growth Pact criteria, but that did not stop it, two years later, from finding itself in a radically different situation, with a 20% unemployment rate, or from completely disregarding those criteria.

What does this mean? It means that, with a Stability and Growth Pact that is narrowly focused on public finance criteria, which are absolutely necessary but insufficient, until recently, Spain controlled its public debt and its public deficit but, at the same time, allowed its private debt to soar. There has been an explosion in private debt, a speculative bubble on the property market, and a recession on a much greater scale than elsewhere, with the result that a massive injection of public money is required. This is indeed proof that, by having a blinkered view of the Stability and Growth Pact and a view of euro area governance that is focused solely on public debt, one fails to see the bigger picture, which would make it possible to anticipate the next crisis and to prevent it.

I should therefore like to know what proposals both the Spanish Presidency and the Commission have put on the table in order, of course, to reaffirm the Stability and Growth Pact and, above all, to integrate it into a more comprehensive system.

Secondly, you say – and you are right – that public finances need to be controlled better, that a return to more stable debt levels is necessary. In your view, does that depend solely on a decrease in public spending, or does it also depend on the ability to increase certain taxes? If so, which ones? Also, what role can fiscal cooperation between ourselves play in enabling the Member States to regain some room for manoeuvre that will allow them to make up their deficits, not only by reducing expenditure, but also by regaining some room for manoeuvre so as to increase their revenues?

Kay Swinburne, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Madam President, sovereign debt spreads have widened dramatically over recent months for certain euro Member States, leading to much speculation in the markets about defaults, bail-outs and even the viability of certain Member States within the euro framework.

The EU, through the ECB, cannot impose fiscal criteria on these Member States. Nevertheless, the effects of this crisis have repercussions for the EU and the ECB in terms of having to orchestrate a solution, international confidence in the euro model and the future smooth operation of the euro sovereign debt markets.

We have spent a lot of time and energy in the last year investigating procedures, oversight, transparency and effective risk management of international capital market participants. These measures affect the secondary market in securities, but I believe there is a strong case to apply the same principles to the primary market, particularly in the unique situation of the eurozone debt-issuing members.

Specifically in the UK, Northern Rock became insolvent as it raised money in the short-term markets to fund long-term liabilities. When the market questioned the business model and refused to lend, the business model de facto collapsed. Certain euro Member States are facing the same issues right now. I propose that the ECB, whilst not having any power over budgets or capital-raising, can have an input over the debt maturity profile if it felt that a Member State is over exposed through short-term market movements.

Greece has to raise EUR 31 billion over the next few weeks. Portugal has to roll over existing debt equivalent to 17% of its GDP at a time when France also has to roll over existing debt equivalent to 20% of its GDP. The maturity profile of debt is left to Member States, but the cumulative effect of tapping the market simultaneously leaves the EU exposed in times of crisis, leading to difficulties in raising capital in the markets.

In the eurozone, perhaps the ECB should have an oversight of accumulative debt issuance and advise Member States on responsible management.

In conclusion, a simple first step would be for the EU, and specifically eurozone Member States, to have a sustainable debt maturity strategy as the absolute debt level at this time is less important than the amount of debt which is up for renewal.

Nikolaos Chountis, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (EL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the new Commission is starting its job with a huge lie: not only are the Treaty of Lisbon and the Lisbon Strategy not helping to protect us from the crisis; they are one of the causes which drove us into it. They have failed resoundingly.

The global crisis highlighted the boundaries, the strengths and the structural problems of the European global development model. The Stability Pact no longer exists; the crisis abolished it, as proven by the deficits and rate at which public debt is increasing in Germany, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Great Britain and Greece.

The crisis does not only concern Greece. It concerns the European Union and, because of the decisions taken, it concerns the euro area. The Left warned against and opposed these policies. Unfortunately, the Right and the social democrats are insisting on using the same tools to deal with the crisis.

With the Lisbon Strategy, we have dismantled the social state. We talk about a Europe of cooperation, while the European Central Bank is lending to merchant banks at a rate of interest of 1%, but allowing the Member States to borrow from the money markets at a rate of 6%. The European Union is following the United States in terms of its model and its military services. How is it that we accept the US credit-rating firms, such as Moody and others, as the official judges of the economic policy of the Member States and let them dictate economic policy?

We therefore need to change the Stability Pact and replace it with a Development and Employment Pact. The European Union cannot and must not compete at global level on the basis of wage costs. Finally, we must discourage the promotion of competitiveness on the basis of a deterioration in labour relations and rights.

Nikolaos Salavrakos, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (EL) Madam President, earlier we heard the programming statement by Mr Barroso and his new team of Commissioners.

I personally was left with the impression that all of us who are members here are in the same boat, not the same armada. There is a huge difference.

Based, therefore, on Mr Barroso's programming statements, I look forward to the future of the Union being designed on the basis of stronger ties between the Member States, especially at economic, social and development level. However, I fear that there will be a huge increase in 'stray' capital, in 'nomadic capital' which moves and is moved on the markets. By promoting and then abandoning local markets, like a passing tornado, it is destroying the real economies and reaping profits with no real investment. The euro, of course, limited the potential for 'stray' capital to speculate on exchange rates.

That, therefore, is the reason for the attack suffered today by Greece, which needs special support. Bearing in mind, therefore, that the European Union, according to the 2008 statistics, produces approximately 38% of global wealth, I think that, in the present monetary crisis, the European Union failed or did not wish to exert its powers of economic intervention on the global financial markets.

I wish to send a message both to this Parliament and to all my fellow members; a message from Schumpeter. There is a creative destruction which will leave Europe, the European currency and Greece unscathed, but

which is absolutely necessary in order to demonstrate, both to Greece and the other Member States, the solidarity of the Member States.

Jean-Marie Le Pen (NI). – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, what is happening in Greece and Portugal today, and in Spain and Ireland tomorrow, is scandalous. These same Anglo-Saxon agencies, which sat back obligingly while the rogues issued and traded in toxic assets and which did not see anything coming, are now the strictest of all towards those Member States that rushed to the aid of a financial sector that was undeserving of it.

The crisis caused by the irresponsibility of the markets and the banks, and this huge amount of aid, are directly responsible for the increase in the public deficits and the public debt that these same markets are today trying to penalise.

So much for the ethical capitalism announced by Mr Sarkozy, the European Union and the G20. The only lesson the bankers have learnt from the crisis is that the taxpayer is an endless source of resources, profits and guarantees, for rumour has it that the scale of this panic is down to a US bank, which received US Government aid, and to two hedge funds, also from the United States, which want to profit both from the exorbitant interest rates imposed on Greece and from the credit default swap market, those insurance policies on government borrowing, which themselves are the subject of independent speculation.

It will not be enough to regulate hedge funds – which you are scared to do – or the derivatives markets, as Mr Barnier is proposing. There is no point in creating a European economic government. The Twenty-Seven are in the same mess anyway, and solidarity is not an option. It is the free international movement of capital that must be called into question, otherwise there will not be a recovery, but a repeat of the crisis.

Jean-Paul Gauzès (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, President, Commissioner, like Mrs Wortmann-Kool before me, I am, of course, going to tell you that we approve of the positions adopted by the Commission to deal with the current situation in Greece.

As regards the Spanish Presidency, we are pleased to note the objective that you are setting yourself to improve the coordination of economic policies. This strong political will must also be applied in order to see through two current and important projects: the structuring of a genuine form of financial supervision and the regulation of hedge funds.

True, Europe must not be a fortress, but nor must it be a sieve. In both these areas, the Presidency really must have room to manoeuvre so that it can negotiate productively with Parliament. We expect the Council, at its next meeting, to send out a strong signal to the public and to the market: to the public to restore confidence in the euro, and to the market to show its solidarity with Greece. The Council must give a strong indication that it will not let itself be overawed by the attempts to destabilise the euro made by certain speculators who have no hesitation in speculating against those Member States that are currently facing economic and social difficulties.

Pervenche Berès (S&D). – (FR) Madam President, Mr López Garrido, Commissioners, this debate is important, not only because the euro is under attack, but also because on Thursday, we will have the first summit under the leadership of President Van Rompuy.

I note that, today, Europeans are standing firm and are convinced that we cannot allow the IMF to intervene in Greece. I welcome this, because it would mean closing the door on everything that we have been requesting for so many years, namely economic governance of the euro area.

When we call for economic governance of the euro area, it means that, faced with the volatility of the markets, we need to equip ourselves with the means to react and to keep pace with the markets. Clearly, today, we are failing on that score.

What I also see is that the situation within our European apparatus today is such that if you are outside the euro area, you can be 'helped', whereas if you are inside it, things are much more complicated. I never imagined the euro area becoming a zone in which there is no solidarity. The very operation of the euro area is based on the concept of solidarity.

None of the member countries of the zone, no matter what its export strategy, no matter what its deficit level, no matter what its public debt level, has a chance of emerging from the crisis if one of the links is attacked.

Yet what are we seeing today? A mechanism that works in such a way that the financial markets pit the different parties against one another, test our capacity for solidarity and test our ability to keep the very concept of the euro area alive. For the euro area concept is the idea that, if we want to give ourselves room for manoeuvre, to look beyond speculation as the only mechanism available, then we have to develop our own strategy.

However, this ability to basically become somewhat immune to the way in which the foreign exchange markets were operating prior to the adoption of the euro, with the sovereign debt rating mechanisms, has been reintroduced within the euro area itself.

This is what we must focus our attention on. This goes far beyond the proposals that are today on the table, and it is incumbent on President Van Rompuy to embark, next Thursday, on those projects, which are very important.

Peter van Dalen (ECR). – (NL) Greece only recently gave an insight into the actual extent of its debts. They are much bigger than had been thought. The budget deficit is approaching 13%. Unfortunately, Spain, Portugal and Italy also have high budget deficits.

Europe must not bring in a Trojan Horse. That would indeed be the case if support were granted to these countries, as some people wish. That must not happen, because we would then be rewarding bad policy with a bonus. The Stability and Growth Pact clearly indicates how countries must act in the event of a crisis and the pact primarily indicates what must be done before a crisis occurs, namely by putting a strict budget and spending policy in place in good time. The Netherlands made a start on this as much as a year ago. The Southern European Member States have left it too late. Fortunately, they have now made a start – better late than never – on putting their affairs in order.

I am watching for the effects of the measures they are taking with great interest. If stock markets and the euro fall a little in the meantime, then that will not be a disaster for either investors or export companies, far from it, in fact.

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, the talk about speculative pressures on the euro area and on the euro and the talk of the risk of economies collapsing in Greece and other countries in southern Europe as a result of public finance problems, excessive debt and deficit is being used to the full by the European Union, the bourgeois governments and other imperialist associations, as an excuse for speeding up and stepping up capitalist restructurings and increasing the degree of exploitation of the working and grassroots classes.

The European Union and the governments are blackmailing and terrorising the workers in order to get them to consent to the rules of the market economy and the European construct of big business, in order to impose wage and pension cuts, flexible forms of employment, drastic cutbacks in social benefits and a barrage of harsh tax measures, and to uproot poor and middling farmers from their land.

It is a lie to say that the capitalist crisis is due solely to maladministration and corruption. Debt and deficits are the creations of the capitalist system, of the Treaty of Maastricht and, of course, of the Lisbon Strategy. That is why the bourgeois governments and the European Union, which bear full responsibility for the situation that has arisen, are calling on the working classes, the grassroots classes to submit and join national campaigns. However, the workers should turn their back, because the interests of the plutocracy are not the same as the interests of the workers, given that we live in a capitalist society.

The workers are demonstrating en masse in response to the war that has been declared and we welcome that and support them.

Barry Madlener (NI). – (NL) Greece may even threaten to declare itself bankrupt along with other countries, thanks to years of weak left-wing policy by left-wing politicians who have held office in Europe: Gordon Brown, Barroso, Schulz, Cohn-Bendit, Guy Verhofstadt. Mr Verhofstadt, could you please also listen to me? Billions have flowed to weak Member States and, even at the time of its accession, Greece appeared to be manipulating the figures, but no, you were blind to that. Europe had to and would expand. Thanks to failing politicians such as you, these economies have been artificially inflated, and now they are deflating.

What is happening now? You are continuing as normal with your disastrous policy. Who is knocking on the door of the European Union? Even more poor countries: Albania, Iceland, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo and even Turkey. Poor countries that are also suffering under enormous corruption. Then there is

Spain, which, despite high unemployment, has legalised some 700 000 illegal immigrants, who have also brought their families here – and there is presently 20% unemployment in Spain!

Mr President, this policy of immigration must stop.

Anni Podimata (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, there can be no doubt that Greece, like other countries in the euro area, faces a huge public deficit and debt and, as you know and as the Commissioner mentioned, the Greek Government has already tabled a fully substantiated and ambitious but realistic programme to deal with them.

There can equally be no doubt that Greece, like other countries in the euro area, has been, and is, at the epicentre of coordinated speculative pressure, the basic aim of which is to undermine the euro and economic cohesion in the euro area. This is not a Greek, a Portuguese or a Spanish problem; it is a European problem and we have an obligation to demonstrate the real causes of this situation.

As we did a year ago, we are stressing that the global credit crisis is linked to the uncontrolled operation of the financial markets and we must be equally direct in stating today that the uncontrolled operation of speculative capital is a basic parameter of the current situation in the euro area and is to the detriment of European taxpayers' money.

So our first obligation today must be to defend the euro and the euro area against speculative pressures and, secondly, we must realise that we can no longer remain fixed on close monetary unification and that, until real economic convergence is achieved between the euro area states, both the so-called slow-lane economies and the overall credibility of the euro area and the stability of the euro will be affected.

Burkhard Balz (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, it has been rare for me to be overlooked. Nevertheless, I will gladly begin my speech now.

We all know that not all Member States in the euro area have been equally hard hit by the financial and economic crisis. In my opinion, however, countries that have been particularly hard hit need to take more extensive measures than those that have not been affected as badly.

The stability of the euro must, of course, remain the crucial and overarching goal. That also applies to the measures for consolidating the budgets of the individual Member States of the euro area. These measures are not only in the interests of the countries themselves, but also of the countries that are not as badly affected.

However, we must also consider carefully what measures are necessary and what measures might perhaps be less effective in helping the countries out of this crisis. Although we could help the countries with the greatest economic problems in the monetary union to obtain money on favourable terms, for example, by means of a Union loan to several euro area states, this favourable external credit would hardly be able to alleviate the acute problems they are facing and would also do nothing about the causes of the problems.

In my view, these countries have, in the past, failed to make important reforms, for which they are now paying the price. The problems are therefore largely of their own making and therefore need to be solved in future by the relevant countries themselves. For that reason, we need to implement strict austerity and reform programmes, as announced by the Commission. In my opinion, it would be disastrous if the taxpayer always ends up footing the bill.

Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, many interesting things are being said here, but I believe that we must have the courage to call into question the very criteria on which the European Union is today based. There is even an article in the Treaty of Lisbon and the Treaty of Maastricht that prohibits the European Union from assisting Greece.

The fact of having given speculators a free rein as one has done by allowing the completely free movement of capital, and the fact of advocating tax competition, which results in zero taxation on capital and companies, means that, little by little, the national budgets are drying up, and now, under proposals such as the one made earlier by Mr Almunia, the peoples are being asked to carry the can by having their salaries squeezed, their retirement age pushed back and their social security systems destroyed.

Therefore, every single one of these criteria must be changed, the Growth and Stability Pact must be replaced with a human development pact for work, employment and training, and the decision must be taken to change the role and the tasks of the European Central Bank so that the euro becomes a unifying common currency and not a currency to be speculated on, as it is today. The decision must be taken to introduce new

initiatives against tax evasion and capital flight, and to do away with tax havens, as had been promised. Lastly, courage must be shown in order to tax speculative capital movements.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Madam President, there is a natural relationship between the current health of a state's economy and the value of its currency. As the economy grows, so should the value of its currency so that it can enjoy the cheapness of goods and services that it chooses to import. Equally, as an economy stagnates or even declines, so will the value of its currency, leading to an export boom and recovery of the economy, assuming, of course, its manufacturing and service industries have not been destroyed by globalisation.

However, the currency of a nation trapped in the euro straitjacket cannot adjust to the needs of its economy and people. This crippled Britain between 1990 and 1992 when we were in the Exchange Rate Mechanism. Now it is strangling Greece and other client states of the euro.

This should be a warning for any country outside the eurozone. Join us at your peril. In the short term, you will see the needs of your economy unattended. When you do decide to withdraw, you will be faced with a debt to the eurozone that has been inflated by your own devalued currency.

José Manuel García-Margallo y Marfil (PPE). – (ES) Madam President, we are here for the first time in the history of the euro to talk about the financial situation of a handful of countries. I am emphasising the word 'countries', because the Spanish Presidency sounded like it was talking about outer space, and Commissioner Almunia only mentioned Greece. I would like to know whether the Commissioner continues to maintain in his closing speech that the problems of Spain and Portugal are similar to those of Greece and if so, what he would do about it.

However, we are here to talk about these financial situations because the finances of a few could ruin the credibility of the currency of all and open the door to a two-speed Europe. The gap could increase when the exit strategy referred to by the Spanish Presidency is implemented, because we could find that the less developed countries have to deal with monetary difficulties and harsher monetary policies and, more importantly, have to use much more money to pay off debts and much less money to create employment. Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, without a sustainable economy, it will be impossible to balance finances. Without employment, tax revenue will continue to fall and unemployment benefit payouts will continue to rise.

We are facing a crisis of confidence, and when there is a crisis of confidence, the first thing we have to do is tell the truth. We have to say how we have ended up here. What are the affected countries doing to get themselves out of debt? Are the stability pacts credible or not? Above all, we need to know what they are doing to straighten out their economies, because as I said before, without sustained growth, there will not be a sustainable economy or sustainable finances.

Elisa Ferreira (S&D). – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, in a monetary union, there can be no attacks on Greece, Spain, Ireland or Portugal, but rather attacks on the Union and attacks on the euro, which make the most of any signs of fragility or any breaches which open up within the solidity of the bloc as a whole. In this context, I must inform you, Commissioner, that your statements were inappropriate and dangerous but, coming from someone with your experience and background, I can only assume that they reflect an outpouring against the stubbornness and inaction by the Commission of which you are part because monetary union is much more, as you well know, than a single currency, a Stability Pact or a single Central Bank.

For monetary union to be sustainable over the long term, it cannot limit itself to looking at short-term, nominal indicators, it cannot leave out the real economy, economic growth or employment and it cannot ignore the substantial internal divergences of a regional and social character which occur alongside it and which the Commission detected very well in the work which it did on the 'EMU@10'.

For these reasons, each member country has its obligations. Whoever believes, however, that monetary union is a project which is now complete is making an unpardonable mistake. We need to stop talking and start acting. The Lisbon Strategy did not work because it had neither means nor instruments. Today, if we want monetary union to persist and remain firm, it is necessary to replace terms such as 'solidarity' and 'economic policy coordination' with concrete means and instruments which, up to now, have not been there.

The Commission has just been put in office not to continue doing what it has done before but to learn lessons and initiate a new phase. That is what I expect and I trust them to do it.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, in this debate, it was fundamental to ensure that the European Union would make a break with its monetarist policies and the blind criteria of the Stability Pact. It was fundamental to back social progress in order to give priority to the resolution of the problems of unemployment and poverty, in order to support production and the creation of jobs with rights, in order to guarantee economic and social cohesion, in order to implement budgetary support measures for those countries in the most serious situations, particularly by advancing funds without the need for the national governments to match them. Unfortunately, however, nothing of that was heard here.

Commissioner Almunia insisted on the same policies and the same neoliberal recipes, attempting to make the same people as always bear the consequences of the bad policies of the European Union, including, Commissioner, your own responsibility for the sad and lamentable statements which you made regarding Greece, Spain and Portugal, which, in the case of my own country, Portugal, for example, resulted in the unleashing of a speculative attack. The speculators did indeed profit from your statements. My own country and others, however, lost as a result of those statements and the policies which are currently in place. For these reasons, we tell you that it is the time to change policy.

Othmar Karas (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioners, the euro is our shield and it has proven to be a stabilising force. That also demonstrates that the Maastricht criteria and the Stability and Growth Pact need to form the essential basis for the deficit strategy and the exit strategy. However, they should not form this basis alone. Both strategies need to be supported by sustainable growth and employment policy. We need to combine the Europe 2020 strategy with the other strategies. We need an innovation agreement, an investment agreement and a coordination agreement in the European Union, encompassing all Member States.

I am therefore in favour of the finance ministers implementing the three-point plan proposed by Mr Almunia on 22 December 2004 for strengthening Eurostat as quickly as possible. These sensible, necessary measures have been obstructed for five years. We need to raise the status of Eurostat and we need to review the statistics of the Member States and to coordinate the statistics of the ECB and the European Union. We need an opening balance sheet for the European Commission, we need to review the finances of the Member States on the basis of common criteria set by the Commission and we need a steering committee between the Commission, Eurostat, the ECB, the EIB and the Member States for national action plans.

Responsibility, honesty and transparency are required – and no games of hide and seek or cat and mouse by the Member States and the finance ministers.

Antolín Sánchez Presedo (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, the economic crisis has enabled us to appreciate the value of the euro and of economic coordination.

It is now indisputable that the role played by the euro area and the European Central Bank in providing stability and a response to the credit crunch, along with the concerted action at European and international level, in which you played an important leading role, Mr Almunia, have made an essential contribution to preventing the most serious and even disastrous effects of the crisis.

The crisis has caused a major decline in economic activity, huge job losses and a considerable deterioration in public finances. Although it appears that there are indications of a burgeoning recovery, the forecasts for this year show a drop in employment and an increase in public debt in the European Union.

The crisis has also brought to light the diversity of situations and the differences that exist between the different Member States. Tensions have emerged, tensions which – let us not be naïve – are not always associated with economic principles or potential. We need to ensure that they do not cause us to forget our serious economic interdependency and our major commitments.

The European Union is facing its greatest challenges since its formation. Someone described international recovery using the letters LUV: L for Europe, U for the United States and V for the emerging countries.

Europe cannot be left behind. It is time for reforms, imagination and integration. The fundamental priority should be to increase the potential for growth of our economy.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the weakness and the recent crisis in certain euro area countries are not just the result of the difficulties of Greece, Portugal and Spain, but also those of the Union itself.

This is not a problem only in terms of economic resources, but it is also a political problem. Before attending to sick countries, Europe must attend to itself, because the real problem behind this crisis is also the Union's weakness. Common and effective rules and instruments are required.

Firstly, we need to expedite supervision reform and to create a system that actually works and does not merely replicate the existing authorities, which have proven to be ineffective in predicting and managing the recent crises, and to move beyond the bureaucratic logic, which, up to now, has been adopted to deal with systemic crises.

Secondly, it is therefore necessary to coordinate and harmonise fiscal policies, even at the cost of leaving behind the more reluctant countries. Some maintain that intervention is required on the part of the International Monetary Fund, ignoring the catastrophic signal that this would send out to financial markets in terms of the direction in which the euro area would be heading. In the case of the current crisis situation in several euro area countries, the European Union has a political, social and moral duty to take action.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) Certain countries in the euro area are currently facing severe financial problems, illustrated by the size of public debts and budget deficits, which are much higher than the threshold permitted by the Stability and Growth Pact. The main logic behind the Stability and Growth Pact was to avoid incidences of 'stowaway' actions by imposing limits on public debt. However, this failed to take into account the need to increase public debt when the financial situation is worsening at macro-economic level, and it is further affected by the exponential rise in private debt.

The rapid decline in the state of finances in certain Member States poses a threat to both the stability of the euro and cohesion at European Union level. To avoid such consequences, solidarity must be demonstrated between Member States by adopting joint measures offering mutual support to countries experiencing difficulties. There is also a need to relax the Stability and Growth Pact's criteria, which is an option provided for in a declaration annexed to the Final Act of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Therefore, it is still our responsibility to show a united political will and implement the reform of the Pact, which has now become a necessity.

Theodoros Skylakakis (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, numerous members have spoken about the help needed by Greece. This is the wrong message. Fruitless debate about aid is of no help. Greece obviously has huge financial problems, but it can deal with them. There is now broad consensus on that, both among political forces and, more importantly, among the Greek people.

I also heard that the main problem for the euro is the speculators. When the euro was strengthened, what were the speculators then? Euro-philanthropists? We need to look at what we are doing wrong.

Greek statistics are also being discussed. Let us not forget, however, that the statistics were also European. Did Eurostat, the European Commission and ECOFIN not know that the Greek debt could not get any bigger without a corresponding deficit? Did the debt, not just the Greek debt, ever drop consistently to 60%? In my opinion, the basic problem in the euro area is that its rules were applied mainly on the basis of political criteria and that those in control and those being controlled are one and the same.

A second problem about which there is too little talk is the overall loss of competitiveness and the ever-widening competition divide between the North and the South. There is no euro area, there is no monetary zone with a widening competition divide between its members. It is a fatal long-term risk to the cohesion of the euro area and is a question which should certainly preoccupy us.

Robert Goebbels (S&D). – (FR) Madam President, with this all-out attack by a few international banks against the euro, the world is once more confronted with the stupidity and greed of the markets.

It is true that the English-speaking countries have never been in favour of the euro. Nevertheless, the euro has become the most stable currency in the world. In fact, the dollar and the euro form a duopoly. A duopoly will always be unstable. There will always be movements between the two currencies. However, if the markets have any sense, they should see that the deficits of the euro area as a whole are well below those of the United States or Japan.

While it is true that the new Greek Government has inherited an unenviable budgetary situation, it is clear that, even if Greece were to go bankrupt, which is totally impossible, it would not cause the euro area to break up. The United States Government had just presented a budget showing a USD 1 600 billion deficit. To make up this deficit, Washington has to borrow each day more than USD 5 billion. Greece's additional

annual debt equates to less than one week of the United States' additional debt. Which country is putting the world's financial stability in danger? Greece or the United States?

Confronted as it is with the stupidity of the speculators, Europe must impose more transparency and more practical regulation on the markets, which really are too greedy, Madam President.

Diogo Feio (PPE). – (PT) Madam President, in a debate regarding the economic situation of certain member countries of the euro area, the remedy is clear: we need more economic and monetary union, we need better competitiveness, and we need better solidarity. I am speaking to you, Commissioner, as someone who, being Portuguese, knows very well the difficulties involved in seeing the public debt grow, the deficit becoming difficult to control or public spending being excessively high. What these countries need is solidarity and the right signals. Unfortunately, the signals sent out by the statements which Commissioner Almunia recently made were not good, when he compared the Portuguese and Spanish situation to the Greek one. They were unfortunate and imprudent statements which had immediate effects on the market. The stock markets in Lisbon and Madrid plummeted; things should not be made more difficult than they already are.

Political management is extremely important. What I know is that this lesson must be learned for the future, because in this way, we can have better economic union, backing Europe to a greater extent in order to create solidarity and understand that the situations in the various Member States are completely different and are not comparable. If we can take away this lesson, it is certain that the future of the euro area will be a better one.

Frank Engel (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, the following observation must be made: the Economic and Monetary Union is indeed monetary, but hardly economic. Europe's monetary concerns are in conflict with the economic and budgetary sovereignty of the Member States.

At this moment in time, speculative attacks on the euro could have disastrous consequences. Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Spain are the most affected. Behind them, however, the entire euro area is at risk.

To avoid the worst, Europe must urgently introduce a form of common governance of its economic and budgetary policies. After all, that is what economic union is all about. Only in this way will we, together, have a realistic chance of consolidating public finances in the euro area and beyond.

With the current instruments, and by persisting with the budgetary sovereignty of the Member States, I fear that this consolidation is a pipe dream, with all the consequences that that entails.

Edward Scicluna (S&D). – Madam President, we must identify any weaknesses in the eurozone and address them with vigour, because the alternatives are too bleak to contemplate. A glaring weakness is the lack of a strong centralised monitoring function of the whole eurozone economy.

Special attention needs to be given, firstly, to the discontinuation of cash-flow accounting by any EU Member State, and their finances. Secondly, the public finances and the reporting need to be audited according to EU-approved standards. Thirdly, oversight should be provided for economic forecasts which have been a cause of unnecessary and misleading public financial projections. Fourthly, the results of stress tests by the EU need to be published regularly. Finally, I think we should discourage eurozone members from the easy way out of financial engineering and fiscal one-offs, delaying real adjustments which we all know must come from credible and sustainable spending programmes.

Olle Schmidt (ALDE). – (SV) Madam President, what is happening in Greece is not just a concern of those who are part of the euro area, but concerns the whole EU. It is therefore important that this difficult situation is dealt with in a responsible manner by the EU. Greece must do its part, live up to its promises and reform its policy. For me – someone who is keen to see Sweden join the euro area as quickly as possible – it is of the utmost importance that we in the EU resolve this difficult situation. It should, after all, be said that the euro has been incredibly successful in weathering the most severe financial crisis. Who would claim that 16 currencies would have been better than one strong currency? No one!

Greece sneaked into the euro area by the back door, which is now showing us how important it is that the rules of admission are tough but fair. A well ordered economy is a prerequisite for growth and wealth, even for those outside the euro, and naturally, that applies just as much to those countries that are part of the euro area. Those talking about speculation should bear in mind that a well ordered economy and public finances form the basis for this.

Michail Tremopoulos (Verts/ALE). – (EL) Madam President, for Greece, about which there is a great deal of talk, the problem is not just a problem of public finances. It is about the complete collapse of the model which has been applied over the last fifteen years and which wanted the Greek economy to be based on a constant increase and expansion in private consumption.

Moreover, for years, some people have maintained that spending on arms is spending on development. As a percentage of GDP, SIPRI reports that Greece wastes 3.3%. This is the second highest percentage in NATO after the United States of America. It is the fifth biggest importer of arms in the world in absolute terms, with 4% of global trade. Of course, reductions in defence spending have been planned in the budget for 2010. The Ministry of National Defence has a budget of EUR 6 billion, down 6.63%.

I wish we would see a change in the arms diplomacy that has brought us to this impasse. Greece has no colonies to exploit, but it does have staying power. We also need to activate European solidarity and to promote international initiatives on a global green new deal.

John Bufton (EFD). – Madam President, what is the future of the euro in the light of the problems in Greece and, for that matter, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland? It must be of some reassurance to the UK that we never joined the euro. It seems promises of strength through solidarity could not be further from the truth.

The problem for the 16 nations in the eurozone is who pulls the purse strings. With little fiscal coordination and no treasury, membership of the euro is by no means an elixir for good economic health. It turns out that, when all turns sour, no one will bail you out. Instead, they take the opportunity to seize greater control while you are on your knees. We must wait to see how Greece will react to becoming an economic protectorate of the European Union and whether it will bring civil unrest. Is this really the European dream? Who is next, Spain, Portugal, Italy or Ireland? Perhaps Member States, and especially the eurozone states, should think long and hard about the here and now before turning attention to talks on economic policy post-2020, when there might not even be a euro to protect.

Mr Barroso this morning talked about the European dream: for the good people of Greece, it has become the European nightmare.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, as we know, the European Commission has placed Greece under supervision on account of its soaring budgetary deficit. This massive intrusion on national sovereignty can really only be justified by the fact that we also need to rescue the single currency and avoid the risk of damage to other participant countries. However, the foundation stone that is the essential prerequisite for the introduction of the euro, namely the Stability Pact, clearly only exists on paper. Many Member States and the Council have expended less energy in recent years on budgetary discipline than on watering down this important agreement. The Commission has sat back and watched this development of half-hearted procedures against deficit offenders.

We therefore need to press for the increasing net indebtedness of the Member States to be drastically reduced if we do not want to put our currency and our economic area at serious risk. For this, absolutely crucial and forceful measures are needed.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) I believe that every Member State must be prepared to join the euro area in order to avoid extremely severe potential adverse effects on the national economy. The economic instability experienced by some countries in the euro area must be kept in check to prevent the consequences being felt across the whole European Union. The economies of Greece, Spain and Portugal recorded large budget deficits in 2009 due not only to the global economic crisis, but also to the inadequate measures implemented by their own national governments.

Romania will present the euro area convergence plan by the end of February, in accordance with the negotiations with the IMF and the European Commission. My country has suggested entering the exchange rate mechanism in 2012, which is actually the phase prior to entering the euro area. This means that our budget deficit must drop below 3%.

Stavros Lambrinidis (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, thank you for your kind words about the measures being taken by the Greek Government. The government has indeed introduced harsh measures, and the European Commission has indeed ratified the government's programme and a very harsh programme has indeed been ratified in order to monitor the application of the measures, which the government instigated and which it wants.

And yet the spreads increased. The problem is not that the markets were reserved, as you said. The problem is that the markets speculated and speculated wantonly. The very people who caused the crisis are now making money from the ruins they caused. And what about the European Commission?

I ask you the following: firstly, will you take action now, not only for strict monitoring of the states, but also for strict monitoring of the markets and, if so, what?

Secondly: it is unacceptable that talk about the International Monetary Fund in the euro area has dragged on for so many months. However, the International Monetary Fund does one thing: it imposes harsh measures and then lends cheaply, which leaves no room for speculators. Do you intend to take steps to give financial support to the countries which apply such harsh public finance programmes?

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) The situation which has arisen in some countries in the euro area requires serious consideration. Seeking its causes in the economic crisis is only partially justified. Many of the causes lie elsewhere. Firstly, the great differences in the level of economic development in different euro area countries was ignored. Secondly, the discipline of the Stability and Growth Pact was not maintained. Budgetary discipline was not kept in a responsible way, which led to a large growth in the public finance deficit. Thirdly, banks and other financial institutions were not suitably monitored – this does not apply only to these countries. How can we fight this? In accordance with the solidarity principle, the repair programme prepared by individual countries must receive support from the European Union, which entitles the European Commission and the European Central Bank to monitor realisation of the programme. For it is also unacceptable that the costs of the crisis should be borne primarily by the poorest, an example of which was the protests by Greek farmers.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, about ten years after the creation of the euro area, it is clear that the European Union exists but, unfortunately, we are still a very long way from economic union. We see that the attack on the euro via the weakest national economies is taking on epidemic proportions and Europe is, ultimately, a spectator, not so much because it was surprised, but rather because it does not have the financial tools to react.

There is no institution, with the exception of the Committee on Competition, which can coordinate the interventions and actions of the national economies in times of recession. Unfortunately, there is no unanimity and common determination between the Member States, even though we have a common currency.

I think that today's test does not have any one country's name on it. It is a test for the euro itself. I would like to believe that, when we decided to have a single currency, we had already decided that we would now have a single voice and a united front.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – Madam President, thank you for indulging so many one-minute speeches on this issue. The new Commission, I presume, is pleased to be in place, but it is going to have to hit the ground running because of the problems we are discussing here.

There are those who are revelling in the problems of the eurozone, but I think the bulk of us want to see a resolution. Ten years on, I do not think we should throw the baby out with the bathwater. Having said that, it is very clear from listening to this debate that there are serious problems in some Member States, and the severity varies among those with problems – and Ireland is one of those. However, the rules in my view have not been effective. We need to pre-empt rather than react: when a crisis is with us, it is too late. We need to be ahead of the markets; you cannot buck the markets as others have tried to suggest we can, so we need to have strict and timely supervision and scrutiny and then immediate action. I wish you well.

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Madam President, despite all the criticism that people like me have expressed about particular deplorable states of affairs in the European Union, we were always very much in favour of the introduction of the euro. Back when I was a correspondent for *der Spiegel* magazine, I saw speculation against particular currencies and the euro has protected us against that.

However, what we are seeing now is a massive loss of confidence by savers and, in particular, by citizens in countries in which the budgetary criteria have, to a certain extent, been met. My question to you, Commissioner, is this: has it not become abundantly clear to you over the last few years that Greece is deceiving us? There have been abundant rumours in this regard. However, we knew that Greece did not actually fully meet the criteria at the start. Why has this not been monitored more intensively? How do you intend to deal with such a difficult issue in future? I ask this with my own country, Austria, entirely in mind, where similar rumours are currently circulating in the same way they did about Greece a few years ago.

Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš (PPE). – (LV) Madam President, the attacks by speculators on Greece, Spain or Portugal are not the cause of the problem, but its consequence. We know too well that no family can long afford to spend more money than it earns. The result is bankruptcy. The same applies to governments. No government can long afford to spend more money than it collects in tax revenues. The result is either bankruptcy for the government, or, as we are currently experiencing, attacks on the currency by speculators. What these countries have to do is what Latvia, which was affected by the crisis as long as a year ago, nearly a year and a half in fact, has done. That is, to reduce their government spending drastically by so-called internal devaluation. I would suggest that the Greek Government take advice from the Latvian Government on how such decisions may be made. They must be made, and they already have been made in Europe in the past. Thank you.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, I think that we have had a very broad debate, with great awareness of and concern for the economic situation. It has also been a very constructive debate, with a series of points on which we can agree in terms of assessing the situation.

Firstly, I think that there has been a general confidence in the euro area during the debate. The euro area will undoubtedly emerge strengthened by these sudden movements in the markets, which cannot be explained by the situation of the real economy. As pointed out by Mr Karas, Mr Sánchez Presedo and Mr Goebbels, who talked about what is meant by what someone described as the protective shield in the euro area, we are convinced that if the euro area had not existed, the crisis would have affected European countries much more.

Furthermore, we do not believe that the Stability and Growth Pact is in crisis. The proof of this is the detailed procedure referred to by Commissioner Almunia for supervising the programme implemented by the Greek Government.

The problems in the euro area will be resolved within the euro area, whose mechanisms are equipped to do so, in a situation in which, as I said in my previous speech, Europe is clearly coming out of the recession and is emerging from the most serious crisis that we have seen for nearly a century. It is doing so in a relatively short period of time, which demonstrates the economic strength of the European Union, and also that the governments acted immediately when something happened that had the potential to cause the international financial system to collapse. Naturally, this immediate intervention had to result in deficits. There are currently 21 European Union countries that have been in this situation, which is the logical consequence of the essential intervention because, amongst other things, as I said before, in Europe there are social protection systems that mean that the most vulnerable people have to receive help from the public coffers.

Mr Canfin asked me what proposals the Spanish Presidency has in this respect. There have been short-term interventions by the governments, which I have mentioned. A strategy is emerging for bringing us out of this situation, but obviously, in order to bring us out of the crisis in the medium term, the Spanish Presidency of the Council is clearly proposing economic union. It is proposing that there should not only be monetary union, but that economic union should also have an important place in the European Union, which is, furthermore, what the Treaty of Lisbon states.

Article 5 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states this very clearly: 'The Member States shall coordinate their economic policies.' 'The Union shall take measures to ensure coordination of the employment policies.' 'The Union may take initiatives to ensure coordination of [...] social policies.'

This is stated in the Treaty of Lisbon, and I am therefore very much in agreement with moving towards harmonisation. For example, Mrs Wortmann-Kool, Mr Feio and Mr Papanikolaou referred to this in their speeches. Mr Bullmann mentioned the need for socio-political coordination, as did Mrs Podimata. Likewise, there was the position of Mr Canfin of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, and of Mr Pallone and Mr Gauzès, who talked about the need for regulation of the financial markets. Mr Verhofstadt talked about the need for internal cohesion in the Union. All this is what we could call economic union, internal economic cohesion in the Union.

This is what we need to aim for, with clear political leadership of the Union, which is already taking place. We need to think about the fact that the day after tomorrow – just as the Spanish Presidency of the Union has begun, incidentally – the informal European Council is going to meet to take the reins of the situation politically speaking. I am sure that it will also send a strong European message to the public and to economic and social players, a pro-European message, a message of European unity, of confidence in the European governments, including the Greek Government, and of confidence in our opportunities.

This is an important European Council meeting, which is being held now in order to focus our efforts on a strategy for growth and job creation, which we call Europe 2020. I am convinced that the initial foundations for this strategy are going to be laid at this immediate, very early Council meeting, which means that we want to act immediately and with political leadership in the European Union in this time of need.

Joaquín Almunia, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (ES) Madam President, thank you very much to all the Members of this House who have spoken during the debate for the references that they have made to the policies, attitudes and proposals of the European Commission, of which both I and my colleague, Olli Rehn, have taken note.

Allow me to say a few things, which I will say in four points. There have been many speeches and I cannot answer each and every one of them, but I believe that I can essentially respond to all of them using four points.

Firstly, as I have said many times in Parliament over a period of nearly six years as Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, I fully agree with the need to increase coordination within the Economic and Monetary Union and within the European Union. All of the Member States of the Union that are not yet members of the euro area, in other words, of the final phase of the Economic and Monetary Union, are going to be, apart from two Member States that have an opt-out. I do think, however, that in the next few years, we will see them abandoning their opt-outs and wanting to join the Economic and Monetary Union too.

In order to have coordination, we need to deepen and broaden supervision, and the activities of analysis, debate and recommendation based on that analysis and debate, with regard to fiscal policy and other macro-economic and structural policies.

If you recall, this was one of the first conclusions of the report that I presented here on behalf of the Commission in the first half of 2008, before Lehman Brothers, on the first 10 years of the Economic and Monetary Union. Since then, we have debated in the Commission, in the Eurogroup and in the Council, and also here in Parliament, how to improve that supervision, how to extend it, through what is now the heart of supervision and the framework for budgetary discipline, the Stability and Growth Pact, while also broadening it.

I agree with those of you who have said that it is not only about implementing a fiscal and budgetary policy that is in line with our rules, but that there is a need to go further, because there are other imbalances that put growth, employment and the situation of public finances at risk.

I agree with all of you who said that we do not need to call on the International Monetary Fund for all of this. It is true that all of our countries are members of the International Monetary Fund, but we can and must do it ourselves.

If we are coordinated enough, if we have political will, if we use the tools provided by the treaty, if we carry through our declarations of intent and major objectives to their ultimate conclusion, we have more than sufficient capacity and tools to do what we need to do in order to tackle difficult situations such as the one that we are currently facing.

In the case of Greece, I will mention two issues that have been the subject of debate, which I have already discussed in detail. Firstly, Mr Verhofstadt, who is unfortunately no longer here, said that the Commission intervened too late. I do not know how quickly Mr Verhofstadt's country asked the Commission to take action on budgetary matters, but I would like to remind him that there were elections in Greece in early October. Two weeks after coming to power, the new Greek Government corrected the notification that we had received a few days before the elections, changing the deficit from 6% to 12.7% in three weeks!

This was not just a statistical correction. In this massive increase in the deficit in Greece, to a large extent there has been an absolute lack of control of budgetary policy. This is not a statistical matter. They are not asking Eurostat to resolve it. This is an issue of management, due to a government that allowed revenue to drop or did nothing when revenue was dropping and allowed expenditure to increase or pushed expenditure up because the elections were approaching. Plainly speaking, that is what happened.

Moreover, in relation to the statistical problems, and in response to Mr Martin – as I think Mr Karas said – at the end of 2004, I proposed to the Council on behalf of the Commission that we strengthen Eurostat's ability to conduct audits when there were statistical problems that could not be resolved through standard notifications. Eurostat does not compile the data. Eurostat receives notifications from the Member States. In order to see beyond the authority giving the notification, Eurostat needs powers that it does not have. The

Commission asked for those powers and the Council did not grant them. I have told the Council that we are going to ask it for those powers again. My colleague Olli Rehn, who from tomorrow will be responsible, with no more transitions to be made, for economic and monetary affairs, has a proposal prepared for adoption by the new Commission at its first formal meeting, once you have kindly given us your approval today.

Following this notification, the Greek Government put forward a budget for 2010, which had not been put forward before the elections, and not only the Commission but also the Eurogroup and Ecofin approved the excessive deficit in the light of the new situation. We did so with recommendations that could not be prepared until we had a programme in front of us, which the Greek Government drew up and sent to us on 15 January. Based on that programme, as I said before, we made the recommendations on 3 February.

It is true that if we had a magic wand we could have acted on the very night of the elections. I can tell you, however, that I believe that the Greek Government, the Commission, the Eurogroup and Ecofin acted swiftly. The latter two began debating the situation even before we made the recommendations to them. There is no way that we could act more quickly if our aim is actually to resolve the problems. If all we want to do is make statements, of course we could act.

Thirdly, I fully agree with the need to increase confidence in the euro and in the Economic and Monetary Union. This is everyone's responsibility: it is the responsibility of the Member States, the Commission, the Council and Parliament.

Incidentally, as an aside, as some of you have referred to statements that I made when presenting the recommendations for the Greek Programme, I ask you, in the interests of confidence, to refer to what I actually said, rather than referring to what others say that I supposedly said. That is all I ask.

Finally, the Council meeting on 11 February, the day after tomorrow, which was mentioned by Mr López Garrido, among others, is a very important meeting. It is a special Council meeting because there are not many matters on the table. It is a meeting at which there will be two contributions, from the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council, with an open political debate, which, at the present time, is extremely important, with tension in the financial markets that we have not experienced in the euro area since the single currency was created and a crisis worse than we have experienced for 80 years. We need to respond to this situation, not only with an exit strategy, but with a medium-term strategy so that this decade is one of growth and employment.

If you will allow me a minute to say my last words as Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs, I will tell you what I would like to hear at the end of this European Council meeting. I would like to hear a clear demand to each and every one of the Member States, in this case starting with Greece, to meet their obligations, and to implement the measures that they have committed to as members of economic and monetary union and the recommendations given to them by the economic and monetary union authorities. We need to demand that all Member States fulfil and apply the rules that we have all made.

Secondly, I would like a political commitment to be made at the highest level for more coordination, better coordination and the strengthening of the Economic and Monetary Union as an economic zone, not only as a central bank for the economic and monetary zone, not only as a body that issues recommendations.

Both within and outside our borders, economic and monetary union, the euro area, needs to speak clearly, firmly and credibly, because this increases the confidence of our citizens and of the other citizens of the European Union and of the world in our currency and in our project, which is not only an economic project, but goes much further.

Finally, I would like the leaders of Europe to say to the Greek authorities, 'In exchange for your efforts, you have our support.' The support cannot be free of charge. That would create a climate for future imbalances and future crises. The support needs to be clear, and we have the tools to do this, in exchange for a clear commitment that everyone is assuming their rightful responsibilities.

President. - The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I hope that the European Commissioners will be a factor that promotes stability and that they will produce rigorous and well-grounded statements, in contrast to what occurred with the recent statements by Commissioner Joaquín Almunia, who demonstrated a lack of

prudence and contributed to stock market losses and a lack of confidence among international investors in relation to Portugal and Spain.

In order to face up to the crisis, the Member States of the EU launched recovery plans and gave stimuli and incentives to the economy, and as a result, increased their deficits. However, we also know of Member States which, either owing to incompetence or intentionally, were wrong about their deficits. Recent events have obliged the European Union to give new impetus to proposals for supervision and to implement a strengthened strategy of economic coordination.

It is also proposed that a system to monitor the value of each Member State's deficit should be formally implemented, with the aim of quickly defining corrective measures, so as to avoid any irreversible situations. This system should function almost in real time. It is also important to clarify the calculation formula for deficits so as to avoid any massaging of public accounts and to avoid the recurrent use of debudgetisation techniques to camouflage the value of the deficit.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The campaign unleashed as a result of the situation in Greece, which some people are now trying to extend to other countries, is despicable and reveals the true objectives of its principal protagonists, amongst which should be included the European Commission itself and some of the principal economic powers of the EU.

The pressure being exerted on countries such as Greece, Portugal and Spain to fight their deficits cannot be disentangled from the interests of speculative financial capital and its aim of engaging in a turf war for the euro against the dollar. It is these interests that are being defended, even at the cost of the interests of the people in those countries.

Several questions arise:

- What objective reasons exist for us to have to reach 2013 with deficits of less than 3% (regardless of what may happen in terms of economic growth)?
- What is the point of an economic and monetary union which does not implement any policy of solidarity and cohesion?
- If the ECB can regularly lend money to national banks at rates much lower than those which exist in international markets, why can it not do so to governments?
- Why has there been no creation of instruments which might allow those countries in greater difficulty to obtain financing at rates which are lower and closer to those obtained by other countries?

Ivari Padar (S&D), in writing. – (ET) The financial situation in some countries in the euro area, which has been under consideration today, clearly shows the risks that are caused by moving away from the agreements in the Stability and Growth Pact. In light of the problem as a whole, we can see how important it is to have reliable statistics. We must certainly draw serious conclusions from this whole problem, and in every country, both within the euro area and outside it, the way out entails recognising our problems honestly and providing our own measures for getting out of the difficulties, and additionally, solidarity from the European Union. At the same time, the problems described cannot be solved by delaying the expansion of the euro area. It is clear that, if there are countries which have fulfilled the necessary criteria, then those countries must be admitted to the euro area. Time has shown that a single currency has been an additional guarantee of reliability in complex times.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Mr Almunia, Poland is preparing for entry to the euro area, and so we are looking carefully at the problems of euro area Member States. Unfortunately, more countries are experiencing problems, and the European currency now faces its greatest challenge since it was created. Ladies and gentlemen, Greece will not manage on its own. I agree with those who have spoken before me that what is needed is stronger coordination of Member States' economic policies. The global economic crisis has led to the destabilisation of many economies and world markets, in the face of a recovery, albeit a fragile one, are afraid that incompetent action might be taken by Member State governments to prevent the collapse of euro currency markets. Therefore, the only realistic way out of this situation, the only way to prevent the collapse of the currency market is stop-gap help for Greece as well as long-term, planned action to stabilise the position of the euro.

(The sitting was suspended for a few minutes)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS*Vice-President***11. Progress made on resettling Guantánamo detainees and on closing Guantánamo (debate)**

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on progress made on resettling Guantánamo detainees and on closing Guantánamo.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, as you know, the European Union welcomed the promise made by President Obama to close the Guantánamo detention centre. He made the promise in his inauguration speech, and this was later endorsed by a joint declaration of the European Union and its Member States with the United States on 15 June last year.

We are in favour of the law being applied and human rights being respected at all times, and in this declaration, the United States of course agreed. This therefore seemed to be incompatible with maintaining the Guantánamo detention centre, which had also become one of the pretexts for propaganda most frequently used by al-Qaeda.

It is true that the timescale that was planned for closing it – one year – has now passed. It is true, however, that there are difficulties, and we can give some examples, such as former prisoners in Yemen not being able to return there immediately. We are also finding that this issue is very controversial in the United States, although we welcome the fact that President Obama is persevering with his intention to close Guantánamo despite the strong opposition that he is facing in Congress, not only among the Republicans but also among the Democrats.

However, in any case, some prisoners have now left Guantánamo and are going to be tried in ordinary US courts, such as, for example, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the alleged brains behind the 11 September attacks, despite the concern that this generated in the United States.

We have therefore always been clear about our position in our contacts with the United States as well as recently, in the visit to Brussels by the United States' special envoy on this issue, Daniel Fried, who was formerly responsible for relations between the United States and the European Union and who is now responsible for managing the closure of Guantánamo. During his visit to Brussels, and in the context of the human rights dialogue that the European Union regularly holds with the United States, concern was expressed by the European Union about the use of the so-called military commissions and prolonged detention without trial, and naturally, we expressed our opposition to the death penalty. These are very clear, firm positions that the European Union has maintained, is maintaining and will continue to maintain in its relations with the United States.

I imagine that in relations between members of the parliaments, in the transatlantic dialogue between legislators, you will also have had opportunities to uphold the same principles.

I believe that the European Union has fulfilled its agreement with the United States, an agreement that was set out in the joint declaration that I mentioned earlier. There are Member States that have already agreed to receive people who have been or are prisoners in Guantánamo, and the number that we can handle at the moment, among the European countries who have quantified the number of prisoners, along with Switzerland, which is a partner of the European Union in the Schengen area, is around 16.

In any case, you will also be aware that the decision as to whether or not to accept a prisoner from Guantánamo is naturally up to the Member States. The mechanism agreed by the Home Affairs Ministers of the European Union was the realisation of this desire to help the United States. We have always said that we wanted the Guantánamo prison to be closed, as it was clearly contrary to the most fundamental human rights. The European Union therefore needs to help to make this possible, as far as we can and in accordance with the decisions taken – I repeat – by each Member State individually and sovereignly regarding the possibility of receiving these prisoners. We can say that there were 242 prisoners in the detention centre when President Obama came to power, and that 44 of them have left the prison.

The existence of this detention centre is a serious problem, of course, for transatlantic relations. The joint declaration on the closure of the centre was made on the understanding that something similar would not happen in the future. This is, of course, the intention of the United States Government, and the position of

the European Union has undoubtedly contributed to changing the position of the United States and its prison policy in relation to Guantánamo.

As we have said, we also want – and this is also part of the joint declaration by the European Union and the United States – to explore the possibility of establishing and agreeing a set of principles between the European Union and the United States of America that can be a common point of reference in the context of our effort to combat terrorism, which is also part of the joint declaration.

In the European Union, we have a strong desire for the Guantánamo Bay detention centre to be permanently closed, and we welcome the fact that President Obama is persisting in his commitment to do so.

Paweł Samecki, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, the European Union, including the European Commission, has consistently called for the closure of the Guantánamo Bay detention facility. As already mentioned by the Minister, the European Union established a two-tier framework to support the closure of Guantánamo, firstly through the Justice and Home Affairs Council conclusion of 4 June 2009 and the annexed information exchange mechanism and, secondly, through the Joint Statement of the European Union and its Member States and the United States of America on the Closure of the Guantánamo Bay Detention Facility and Future Counter-Terrorism Cooperation of 15 June 2009.

The Council conclusions and the joint statement clearly state that the decisions on the reception of former detainees and the determination of their legal status fall within the sole responsibility and competence of a receiving EU Member State or Schengen-associated country. Former detainees received under this scheme may have access to rehabilitation measures in the EU Member States under the applicable national laws.

In the context of the abovementioned statement on the closure of Guantánamo, on 16 June 2009 the President of the Council wrote to the co-chair of the US Detention Policy Task Force. In this letter, the European Union put forward a non-paper with principles of international law relevant to the fight against terrorism. It includes unequivocal statements on due process guarantees, such as access to court to challenge arrest, detention and transfer, as well as on the prohibition of torture. They have been discussed in detail in the dialogue on counter-terrorism and international law.

The Commission considers these guarantees to be important to this dialogue, as they contribute to a better understanding of how the fight against terrorism should respect the rule of law and international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. As already mentioned, the European Union opposes the death penalty and has intervened in individual cases with third countries, including the United States, to prevent it from being carried out. The Commission will consider appropriate steps in case the death penalty is imposed on a former Guantánamo detainee tried by a US court or military commission. The European Commission appreciates the steps taken so far by President Obama to close Guantánamo and hopes to see further progress on this in the future.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, I would first of all like to point out that the European Parliament has expressed its opinion on the situation of the prisoners in Guantánamo on various occasions through various resolutions.

In his inauguration speech, President Obama said that he was making a commitment to close the Guantánamo detention centre within a year. This deadline passed on 22 January and the fact that it has not been closed is proof that often in politics it is easier to make promises than to keep them.

Also, as the representative of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council said, President Obama's personal representative has visited the European Union, met with our President and with several Member States and asked for our cooperation, which has to be offered on the basis of a series of premises mentioned by the Commissioner. One of these is that this is a problem created by the previous government of the United States, and that the European Union has to cooperate, but on the basis of certain requirements, in particular, the security of our Member States.

In this respect, I would like to recall the decision made by some Member States, including the one that currently holds the Presidency of the Council, my own country. I would like to ask the representative of the Spanish Presidency if he is thinking of taking any additional measures to try to harmonise the response of the Member States to the problems that have arisen in Yemen in particular, or whether he is intending to leave this decision to the individual and sovereign context of each Member State, as decided by the Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs.

One final question, Madam President: it is indeed true that 100 out of the 190 or so prisoners that remain have been sent to their countries of origin or to third countries, and that 40 are going to be subject to the jurisdiction of the United States courts. There are, however, still 50 that are not going to be released because there is not sufficient proof to take them into custody but the risk that they actually pose has forced the United States Government to decide that they should not be released. I would like to ask the Commission and the Council what they think about the situation of these 50 people who are not going to be subject to the jurisdiction of the United States courts.

Ana Gomes, on behalf of the S&D Group. – (PT) Guantánamo is a creation of the Bush Administration but it would not have been possible without the help of European allies and without the silence of the European Union. Hence it falls to the Union to act in accordance with its values and interests, doing everything it can to close this sordid chapter of our history.

The image of the EU in the world, the transatlantic relationship, the fight against terrorism and freedom of movement within the Schengen Area all mean that the request to receive prisoners from Guantánamo merits a collective and consistent European response. However, this response has been late in coming and is limited to bilateral understandings between the United States and some Member States.

It is shocking that large countries that were accomplices of Bush in the extraordinary renditions, in the secret prisons and in Guantánamo, such as Germany, the UK, Italy, Poland and Romania, should shirk their responsibilities by ignoring the appeals of the Obama Administration. This is a topic for the common foreign and security policy, which should be dealt with by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the European Union, in view of Article 24 of the Treaty of Lisbon, and it must be based on mutual political solidarity among the Member States.

It falls to the High Representative, now equipped with the power of initiative, under Article 30 of the treaty, to propose and lead a true European strategy to assist in the closing of Guantánamo as quickly as possible, ensuring the necessary support for the individual recovery and social reintegration of released persons, including their right to family reunification.

I must welcome the contribution of my own country, Portugal, as the first to offer this assistance to the Obama Administration, for urging its other European partners to do the same, and for already welcoming persons who have unjustly suffered years of captivity in Guantánamo.

Sarah Ludford, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Madam President, some European governments actively participated in illegal rendition, torture and illegal detention. Others gave background support. Others pretended not to see. So it was not something that just happened ‘over there’. That is one of the reasons we have kept our continuing interests.

Of course, MEPs spent many years calling for the closure of Guantánamo, so we warmly welcome the announcement by President Obama and we understand the difficulties in unravelling the mess left by George Bush. However, it is extremely frustrating that nearly 200 men remain there. We also fully welcome the federal trials for people like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, but why did it not happen eight years ago? The best response to the terrorists is criminal convictions.

We will continue to push EU governments to take more detainees for resettlement, both out of transatlantic solidarity and out of guilt at their own complicity, and we will resist Chinese threats regarding the Uighurs. It does not help that the United States is unable to settle any of the 17 Uighurs in US territory.

My own constituent, Shaker Aamer, a legal UK resident whose family of a British wife and four British children live in Battersea in London, is still, after eight years, marooned in legal limbo in Guantánamo. He appears to be the victim of pass-the-parcel, whereby the US and UK governments may be colluding to bundle him off to his home country Saudi Arabia. He is a direct witness to his own and others’ torture, not only by the US but by UK secret agents. This would be very convenient in preventing his testimony before UK courts.

We do, as I say, welcome the efforts to close Guantánamo, but we oppose military commissions and other continuing abuses. Europe must do more as well.

Heidi Hautala, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FI) Madam President, Mr López Garrido, the US High Representatives you mentioned also met us Members of the European Parliament when they visited Brussels recently.

Parliament may, of course, be in a key position to encourage Member States to try and establish a common policy with regard to closing Guantánamo. It is very obvious that Guantánamo is still a glaring symbol of injustice and that its closure is in the interests of the European Union.

We expressed the opinion which the European Parliament also stated in its resolution in February last year. We also told them that we did not just want to talk about where to place the Guantánamo detainees, but that at the same time, we also wanted to discuss with the United States the notion that their policy on the care of the prisoners and their penal code needed to be reformed comprehensively in order for it to comply with the principles of the rule of law.

Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, I would hope that you will take this seriously and discuss these matters with the US representatives in the dialogues you mentioned.

Finally, I want to say how important it is for the European Union to render an account of its own involvement in these secret arrests and detention centres. I would like to refer to the important work done by my colleague, Mr Coelho, in the previous parliamentary term. We must continue this work because, to this day, the European Union has still not explained in any way what the role of its Member States was in these secret arrests and detention centres on EU territory.

Ryszard Czarnecki, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Madam President, in reference to the statement of my respected fellow Member who spoke before me, I would like to stress that, in fact, there is no firm evidence and there are no specific facts concerning the existence of CIA detention centres and prisons in some European countries, at least, not in Poland. Once again, in the course of the last few years, we are talking about Guantánamo in the European Parliament. I would like to point out that we have also talked about this during Barack Obama's Presidency, and so it seems this problem is not something we can attribute exclusively to the dreadful and evil administration of George Bush junior. It appears this is something more complicated. I say this because the representative of the Council and the Spanish Presidency said that, in fact, the Americans still have not done everything they promised.

Finally, I would just like to add that it is very good that the European Union is speaking out on matters concerning citizens' freedoms. However, let us also remember the victims – those who are the victims of terrorists.

President. – Mr Czarnecki, will you accept a question from Mrs Hautala?

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, I was referring to the statement of the respected fellow Member of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance who spoke before me.

Heidi Hautala (Verts/ALE). – (FI) Madam President, Mr Czarnecki perhaps does not know that on 22 December 2009, a European government admitted for the first time that there had been such a secret detention centre on its own territory. This happened when a Lithuanian parliamentary committee stated that a CIA prison of this sort had operated in Lithuania in the war against terrorism.

I am happy to note that the Lithuanian Government has acted robustly in response to this revelation.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – Madam President, I thank the honourable Member for this remark, but I would like to inform her that I am a representative of Poland, not Lithuania.

Helmut Scholz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I expressly welcome the fact that the European Parliament is once again debating the subject of the immediate closure of the prison of torture in Guantánamo Bay, and I endorse the words and standpoints of all my fellow Members who have called for decisive action by the European Union and the Member States.

In reality, it is a transatlantic cooperation problem. Almost 800 people from over forty countries have been detained there in disregard of the Geneva Convention – without charge, without a lawyer and without a trial. There are numerous reports of the murder and of the most dreadful abuse and humiliation of the detainees. The fact that most Member States of the European Union have, up to now, shied away from declaring their willingness as third countries to receive detainees from Guantánamo Bay is, in my opinion, a disgrace and quite deplorable, and I call on the Commission to immediately bring this issue before the Council once again, including the subject of the discovery of the part played by European countries in the illegal detention of prisoners there.

I will perhaps finish with one last thought: the use of Guantánamo Bay as a torture prison constitutes a clear violation of the original lease agreement, and Baroness Ashton and the other Members of the Commission responsible for foreign policy should perhaps join with me in calling on the US Government to draw a symbolic line under this disgraceful chapter and give Guantánamo back to Cuba.

Mike Nattrass, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Madam President, I come from the West Midlands, the home of the so-called ‘Tipton Taliban’, who were detained at Guantánamo. As a UKIP MEP, I must agree that seizure and deportation of people from one country to be tried in another, without judicial oversight, and to face foreign imprisonment, is an alien process. It is an affront to liberty, democracy, accountability and natural human rights.

I can give you a list of British citizens who have been forced into imprisonment in this way, into squalid and unfit jails, not at the hands of the CIA and its rendition programme, but at the hands of the EU Member States under the European arrest warrant which this House created. It was made in the EU. So, before you condemn the USA, look in the mirror and see your own hypocrisy.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Madam President, the closure of Guantánamo is surely a sign that the US has to concede that it has violated human rights, including for the purpose of the fight against terrorism, and that it wants to put an end to it. I therefore welcome this step. Slovakia, Italy and other Member States have declared their willingness to accept detainees. In my opinion, that needs to be discussed at European level, as former prisoners could end up in any Member State as a result of the Schengen Agreement. In essence, however, we first need to clarify three points.

Firstly – and this is neither disgraceful nor deplorable, Mr Scholz – the security risk for the host country needs to be clarified. Any specific relation of the detainee to the Member State in question must also be examined. Finally and fundamentally, it should first be clarified conclusively why the prisoners in question cannot also be accommodated in the United States.

Carlos Coelho (PPE). – (PT) Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, Guantánamo was one of the biggest mistakes of the Bush Administration. It violated international conventions, such as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention against Enforced Disappearance, and it permitted arbitrary treatment, disrespect for human rights, the imprisonment of innocent people and torture.

President Obama was entirely correct when he declared that it was essential to close Guantánamo in order to give back to the United States of America the moral authority which it lost by the use of extra-judicial instruments in the fight against terrorism. President Obama made the decision on his first day in the White House to suspend the trials before military tribunals and to announce the closure of the Guantánamo base. His task has not been easy, especially in view of the lack of cooperation on the part of the US Congress.

In this European Parliament, we have always been divided with respect to the transatlantic strategy, but we obtained a broad consensus against the prison of shame. In the Council, deeply divided by the issue of the Iraq war, it was possible for all the Ministers for Foreign Affairs to be unanimous in demanding the closure of Guantánamo. As Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra has already said, several Member States have agreed to receive ex-prisoners into their territories: France, Portugal, Ireland, Belgium, the UK, Italy and Hungary. The decision whether or not to receive prisoners from Guantánamo is a decision exclusively for each of the Member States, but it should be taken on the basis of European coordination. In a Europe without borders and with freedom of movement, information needs to be shared among the Member States.

Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, in expressing my concern at the delay in the situation in America, I should like to ask: what, in your opinion, might the European Union still do to assist? What is it that we are not doing but could still do? And what, in your opinion, is currently impeding or rendering it more difficult for the European Union to give this help?

María Muñiz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, Guantánamo was a legal and humanitarian aberration, perhaps the most visible example of the Bush Administration’s unilateral concept of international society and international relations, with complete contempt for international law. There was a great deal to repair following the Bush disaster, and President Obama is repairing it.

He started off on the right foot a year ago when he announced the closure of Guantánamo as one of his first decisions, a brave decision with which to restore the legitimacy of the United States in the world, and also a

gesture towards the Muslim community. However, the self-imposed deadline of 22 January for the closure of Guantánamo has passed and there are still 192 prisoners.

If the European Union governments really want to establish a genuine strategic relationship, they must support President Obama's decision, and the best way to do so is to accept prisoners or detainees from Guantánamo. Spain and other European Union countries are doing this on the basis of the joint declaration of 15 June which has been mentioned and which established a shared framework for receiving detainees.

However, although technically these are unilateral, sovereign decisions to be made by each Member State, it should be joint action by the European Union to demonstrate its support for a shared European Union decision that Parliament has demanded on several occasions, especially the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament.

This concerns 50 prisoners: those declared to be suitable for release. This is a figure that should be manageable for the 27. In addition to the existing mechanisms for exchanging information between the Member States and the countries that are members of the Schengen area that are taking part in receiving prisoners, we need to have an exchange of information and experiences on suitable practices for socially integrating the former detainees.

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE). – (SL) First of all, I should like to thank the representatives of both the Council and the Commission for their proactive stance on Guantánamo. Guantánamo has been an anomaly and a disgrace since day one, since the day this prison opened. Its opening could perhaps be more easily understood in the wake of the shocking attacks of 11 September, but years have passed since. Yet, the disgrace of Guantánamo continues and, in fact, all of us who believe in the values of Western civilisation, such as respect for human rights and the rule of law, continue to feel ashamed of it.

This morning, I chanced upon a website of a government organisation called Joint Task Force Guantánamo. You would laugh, if their description of the situation in Guantánamo were not so sad: it is described as a five-star hotel and as a place with all the comforts you could need. It is high time we called on Mr Obama to close down this disgrace and spare us the reproach of such hypocrisy.

Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, I, too, hope that everything is done at European level to encourage the Member States to assume their responsibilities and accommodate those Guantánamo detainees who have been proven innocent. They are victims and must be accommodated safely on European soil.

Everyone knows, however, that the closure of Guantánamo will not stop questions being asked about human rights and counterterrorism, either in the United States or in Europe. In the United States, as you said, the antiterrorism law still permits unlimited pre-trial detention and trials before military courts. In Europe, well, the Guantánamo prisoners did not just fall out of the sky. I genuinely believe that there has been a failure to shed light on this subject.

Mrs Hautala rightly spoke of the parliamentary investigation concluded on 22 December by Lithuania. It should be praised to the skies. It is exemplary. It must serve as an example. Conclusions were not drawn from these illegal practices on European soil, and I believe that that is the job of the European Commission; that is the job of the Council.

We must draw every possible conclusion from the illegal practices which took place and which led to the opening of Guantánamo, a decision in which the Member States were fully complicit.

Rachida Dati (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, first of all, we learnt very recently that the Guantánamo detention centre will close not in 2010, as scheduled, but in 2013 – in other words, at the end of President Obama's term of office. Although that closure is taking longer than planned, we can still be glad that it is under way, because it could have also been stopped. It is a response to a wish expressed by Europe. Indeed, we cannot, on the one hand, criticise the United States for years about the Guantánamo centre and, on the other, fail to show much will or ambition on our side in order to help it solve this problem.

A short time ago, I met the Attorney General of the United States, Eric Holder, who explained the scale of the task to me, but who also made me aware of the desire and the will of the United States to benefit from the European Member States' support. This support would entail helping it to close that detention centre by accommodating some of the detainees in Europe. We must therefore help the United States, as part of a coordinated effort, to turn the page on an institution that we Europeans have been opposing for many years.

Katarína Nevedálová (S&D). – (SK) Why should the European Union have to put up with the consequences of American policies? It would be simpler to call for America and its President, who is fulfilling his pre-election promise – in which many leading politicians publicly support him, by the way – to sort out this large and unwelcome problem itself. However, the European Union has much in common with this. Terrorists have also threatened and attacked the EU and continue to threaten the entire world, of which the EU is an integral part. Have we already forgotten the London underground, Germany, Holland, Spain and the dozens of foiled terrorist attempts? We are therefore in this together with America. It affects all of us.

Our attention should rather at this stage be focused especially on the prevention and elimination of negative effects on these people, putting all possible efforts into assisting these people in their social reintegration, so that they can get back to normal life and lead a decent civilian life with the families.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Madam President, I would like to emphasise the point raised recently by Mrs Flautre. It is very important that we help President Obama to close Guantánamo. We have been asking for this for a long time, and it is essential that in the European Union, we also have the necessary support to receive all of the people that the Obama Administration is currently asking us to receive.

This should not, however, cause us to forget that this prison also existed to a large extent because it was encouraged by Europe. We therefore have an historical responsibility that we cannot, under any circumstances, conceal. We need to help to close Guantánamo because it is also essential that we assume our responsibility as Europeans, because this is a European responsibility.

For a long time, Europe has looked the other way, for example, in the case of aircraft. When he was the Portuguese Prime Minister, the current President of the European Commission authorised and allowed flights to pass above Portuguese territory en route to Guantánamo. Ladies and gentlemen of the Council and the Commission, this historical responsibility cannot be allowed under any circumstances.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, we quite rightly all agree to give practical support to the decision by the United States of America to close the Guantánamo detention centre and, of course, we are urging the Member States of the Union to accept detainees.

It is commonly accepted that Guantánamo was a mistake on the part of the United States of America in their endeavour to fight terrorism. However, we must ensure that similar errors are not repeated in future, especially not in Europe. Unfortunately, however, the report to be tabled shortly before the UN Human Rights Council, in March 2010, raises serious suspicions about the practice of the secret detention of suspects in the Member States of the European Union such as Great Britain, Romania and Poland.

We cannot condemn such conduct and say that they are right to close Guantánamo, on the one hand, and tolerate similar conduct, which we perhaps believe does not constitute such a serious problem, on the other. We all need to face up to our responsibilities.

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, I would like to start with what the previous speaker said here. For you said most categorically, Mr Papanikolaou, that illegal prisons existed in Europe, including in Poland and Rumania. Speaking as a Pole, I want to state clearly that there is no firm evidence that such prisons existed in Poland. That is my first comment. Now my second comment: I do not think there is any dispute among us, in this Chamber, about whether Guantánamo should cease to exist. However, it is very easy to see that closing down Guantánamo is going to be a very complicated process, and that no one wants to help with this. We have to ask what can be done about this. Well, I would like to ask the following question: have any changes been made in terms of the techniques used to house and interrogate prisoners? For many methods have been used there – from submerging prisoners' heads in water to depriving them of sleep for many nights. Are we certain these inhumane techniques are now no longer used there?

Krisztina Morvai (NI). – (HU) I am pleased that my fellow Members are so outraged about the heavy-handed infringements of human rights taking place in Guantánamo in the name of combating terrorism. I can take this outrage seriously, however, only if you finally make a commitment, in response to my numerous statements to this effect, to examine the matter of the Guantánamo that exists right here within the EU, in Hungary. I repeat, for the umpteenth time, that in Hungary, there are twelve individuals belonging to the political opposition who have been in pre-trial detention for nearly a year on charges of terrorism, and who are kept in the same conditions and whose criminal procedural rights are being infringed just as much as those of the prisoners at Guantánamo. I would ask that my fellow Members kindly indicate with a show of hands who among you is willing to take this case seriously and take part in a detailed investigation. I am waiting for the show of hands by Madam President and my fellow Members.

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Madam President, I would like to discuss two very specific matters that have been mentioned: one by Mr Salafranca and another by Mr Scholz.

The first matter is Yemen. With regard to Yemen, I do not have any evidence that a specific decision has been made or is to be made connecting Yemen with prisoners that come from there and are in Guantánamo. The situation in Yemen was the subject of conclusions of the first Foreign Affairs Council meeting in the history of the Union. There has only been one ordinary Foreign Affairs Council meeting, on 25 January, and there was a conclusion inviting Yemen to conduct a programme of major political reforms, but no reference was made to the issue of Guantánamo. We do, of course, support these conclusions, as well as the conference that was held in London on 27 January.

With regard to an allusion made by Mr Scholz to the Guantánamo Bay situation and the possibility of its territorial status being changed, this is an issue that arises from the international treaty of 1903 between the United States and Cuba. Therefore, it is an entirely bilateral issue between Cuba and the United States.

I believe that there is a general agreement that the Guantánamo prison constitutes a series of serious human rights violations and legal aberrations that cannot be tolerated, that we do not want repeated, and that the European Union has severely criticised. It is for this very reason that we want to work with the President of the United States, who decided to put an end to Guantánamo and to close the prison. Not only this, but he also decided that there would be a review of United States prison policy.

There are therefore strong grounds for Mr Vajgl's comments about the intrinsic need to close this prison due to massive human rights violations, and for other comments that have been made. Moreover, I believe, in any case, that the fact that human rights violations take place in other countries of the world or in Europe does not mean that this situation should not be criticised or that we should not work to ensure that it does not happen again. I am saying this in relation to the speech by Mr Natrass, because I am of course sure that he agrees that there is nothing in Europe similar to the Guantánamo prison.

The European Union and the United States have worked very thoroughly on this issue. I have mentioned the declaration made on 15 June last year in which the United States and the European Union committed to working for the consolidation of human rights and the fight against terrorism. This concerns the human rights violated in the Guantánamo prison, but also the need for the fight against terrorism to be conducted with absolute respect for freedoms, fundamental rights and legality. It is important for us to be in line with this. I therefore completely agree with what Mr Coelho said about the importance of the European Union contributing to this.

However, we are not only talking about the decision by the United States to close Guantánamo, with all the problems that brings, which I discussed in my first speech. It also has to be recognised that President Obama is genuinely breaking with the past. This means turning over a new leaf, not only with Guantánamo, but with all of the practices that have surrounded it. I think that this is very clear when we look at the measures that President Obama has adopted.

He has put an end to the secret detentions by the CIA, and has ordered that from now on, all United States prisoners be registered with the International Committee of the Red Cross. He has put an end to the 'enhanced' interrogation techniques, also by the CIA. This means that US investigators can no longer use legal opinions on torture and interrogation techniques that arose after 11 September as justification, which of course means turning over a new leaf. There has also been a re-examination of transfer policy to ensure that it is in line with international law.

This is something that we welcome, and we said so in the joint declaration. We welcome the fact that there has been a thorough review of United States policy on detention, transfer, trial, interrogation and the fight against terrorism. We therefore said explicitly in the declaration that we noted the commitment by the United States to reconsider all the issues surrounding security, and to comprehensively review the policies undertaken, thanks to the order signed by President Obama on 22 January 2009.

I believe that this is something that needs to be pointed out. In order to achieve it, we do, of course, need to cooperate, and Mrs Muñiz de Urquiza referred to this very explicitly: to cooperating with the United States. Europe has criticised the prison on many occasions, and Europe needs to cooperate as far as possible, although there are two types of limitation. There is one that affects the United States, which is that ultimately, it is United States legislation and United States sovereignty that is being applied. The other is that the Member States of the European Union also sovereignly decide whether to accept prisoners from Guantánamo.

Of course the Presidency-in-Office of the Council is clearly in favour of cooperation and of encouraging cooperation, while respecting the right to security of every country and every citizen, which is therefore another principle that needs to be taken into account. Therefore, as Mrs Gomes said, we need to promote cooperation between the United States and the European Union, but also cooperation between the Member States of the Union.

We need to cooperate among ourselves on this, we need to have dialogue among ourselves, and part of this dialogue needs to go even further than the specific subject of Guantánamo. This matter has been mentioned in some of the speeches, for example, by Mrs Hautala and Mr Czarnecki: the subject of victims. I think that this is one of the areas of dialogue that we should implement in our relations with the United States. I think that this dialogue regarding the victims of the various terrorist crimes is a matter that needs to be dealt with in the future, but in any case, there is an in-depth dialogue ongoing with the United States on this issue.

I would like to finish by saying that the European Union has a very clear position regarding the issue of Guantánamo in favour of the closure of the prison. The European Union has a very clear position that human rights and fundamental freedoms should not be violated on any grounds, and, of course, in favour of the fight against terrorism and the need to work together with the United States. This is a credible position, given that there has undeniably been a radical change, an obvious radical change from the past, in terms of the counter-terrorism policy of the United States and of President Obama and in terms of a whole series of policies relating to detention, transfer and interrogation. This is the position that we need to strengthen and help to consolidate. The Council's position is therefore one of clear cooperation with the United States in order to achieve what we all want, which is the permanent closure of the Guantánamo prison.

Paweł Samecki, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, first of all, I want to reiterate that we believe that it is in the interests of all of us in the European Union to close the Guantánamo detention centre, and, as I have stated before, the Commission expects further progress on closing Guantánamo in the near future to be made by the American Administration.

As a comment on Mr Scholz's intervention, I would like to underline again that we believe that the prime responsibility for Guantánamo lies with the United States. However, the Commission is of the opinion that we, the European Union, should be as helpful as possible in resolving the issue and some important steps have already been taken by the Obama Administration. They were mentioned by the Minister.

In response to Mr Zemke's question, we should indeed mention that Obama ended the use of enhanced interrogation measures and techniques, and we welcome this step.

In response to Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra's question about the 50 detainees whose fate is not decided yet, we believe that the US Administration will proceed with those 50 cases and they will achieve a state or solution similar to those achieved in the previous ones.

The Commission has not yet received the report of the task force, so we cannot give you any specific clarification, but in general, we believe that we want a due process for all.

Finally, we believe that we should continue to support a coordinated EU approach to the situation, and we will appreciate Parliament's input and efforts in this respect.

President. – The debate is closed.

12. Key objectives for the Conference of the Parties to the CITES (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on:

– the oral question to the Council on key objectives for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Doha, 13-25 March 2010, by Jo Leinen, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (O-0145/2009 – B7-0003/2010), and

– the oral question to the Commission on key objectives for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Doha, 13-25 March 2010, by Jo Leinen, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (O-0146/2009 – B7-0004/2010).

Jo Leinen, *author*. – (DE) Madam President, Madam President-in-Office of the Council, Mr Samecki, 2010 is the International Year of Biodiversity and the EU is about to press ahead with a new strategy for biodiversity, in other words, for the protection of flora and fauna within the area of the European Union. It would greatly enhance the credibility of the European Union if we were also to work on an international level to protect endangered flora and fauna globally and to give this our support.

There will be an opportunity for this next month at the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Doha. The EU must make itself a champion for all species which, as a result of various different factors, but in particular, over-exploitation or destructive and illegal practices, are endangered or even threatened with extinction. The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety has debated this issue in detail and will table a proposal for a recommendation in plenary tomorrow, and we would be very pleased if the Council and the Commission were able to endorse these recommendations.

Due to the time constraints, I will just mention a few example species which, in our opinion, are in need of a high or an even higher level of protection. Firstly, there is the African Elephant. We are most definitely opposed to the downlisting of this animal from Appendix I to Appendix II. The prohibition of international trade, particularly in ivory, must remain in place. Secondly, there is the Asian tiger. It is now on the brink of extinction, and we are demanding stricter protection regulations for many parties to the Convention, in particular to prevent the illegal trade in the body parts and derivatives of the tiger. We know that there is a large market for tiger bones and components of the tiger in Asia and this is threatening the existence of this animal. Thirdly, there is the protection of the polar bear. Climate change is threatening to destroy the habitat of this species and there is also an increase in trade in the body parts of polar bears. We are therefore in favour of uplisting the polar bear from Appendix II to Appendix I. I would also like to mention the protection of various species of shark. Various shark species are being over-fished, in particular the porbeagle and the spiny dogfish, but other shark species are also affected by this.

Up to this point, there is consensus among us. I now come to the controversial issue. The source of the controversy is the classification of the Atlantic bluefin tuna, which is found in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. Ladies and gentlemen, we are aware of the recommendations of the ad-hoc working group of the FAO, which wants to leave the Atlantic bluefin tuna in Appendix II. However, we are also aware of the proposal by the CITES scientific committee, which wants to uplist the Atlantic bluefin tuna to Appendix I. The background to this proposal is the data which reveals what is happening with this species. The stocks of Atlantic bluefin tuna declined by 75% between 1957 and 2007, and in the last ten years alone, there has been a decline of 60.9%. The risk to this fish is increasing and gaining momentum and therefore, the vast majority of us in the committee were of the opinion that this species should be included in Appendix I.

This means that there will only be restrictions and prohibitions on international fishing fleets, not local fishing. Thus, the small, local fishermen can continue to catch this fish, and the preservation of the fish in the ecosystem is, in any case, more important than the general availability of sushi and sashimi. That is the conflict that we face. We need to take a long-term view and should provide proper protection for the Atlantic bluefin tuna in Appendix I.

Silvia Iranzo Gutiérrez, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour for me to be here on behalf of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council. I am very grateful for your interest in the positions to be taken at the next Conference of the Parties to the CITES Convention – the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – to be held in Doha (Qatar) on 13 to 25 March.

The Council considers the Washington Convention to be a fundamental instrument for the protection of species of fauna and flora that are in danger of extinction. We therefore need to play an active role in order to ensure that CITES is maintained as an effective tool for its dual objective of conservation and the sustainable management of natural resources.

In this respect, it should be pointed out that the European Union applies much more restrictive regulations than the Convention itself, using the principle of precaution in order to maintain or, if necessary, reduce the loss of biodiversity.

The next Conference of the Parties, to be held in Doha in March, referred to as the 'COP XV', is a great opportunity to debate a series of proposals to change the classification of various species of flora and fauna in the appendices to the Convention according to the level of threat, and other proposals to improve the application and observance of the Convention.

The European Union will play a constructive role in the Conference of the Parties, and I am particularly keen to hear Parliament's views on the various matters that we have on the table.

We have followed with interest the debates that have taken place in Parliament's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety in order to draw up the resolution that I understand is to be put to the vote tomorrow on the strategic objectives that the European Union should set for the conference.

I must say that the Council is still awaiting a proposal from the Commission on the position that the European Union should adopt regarding the documents and proposals submitted to the Conference of the Parties to be debated and, if appropriate, adopted. It is therefore difficult at this time to give detailed answers on these issues.

As soon as the Council receives the proposal from the Commission, the Spanish Presidency will ensure that it is examined, and that the corresponding decision can be adopted before the Conference of the Parties begins. The Spanish Presidency will also inform Parliament of the Council's position once it has been agreed.

As in previous meetings of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, the Member States will work together to defend the position agreed within the European Union, and will ensure that it is consistent with the Union's policies.

It is important to point out in this respect that any amendment to the appendices to CITES should be based on the inclusion criteria set out in the Convention, which take into account the conservation status of the species concerned.

These amendments should also take into account the importance of controls in the context of CITES in order to improve conservation status, minimise unnecessary administrative burdens and ensure that resources are allocated directly to the areas that are of genuine concern for conservation.

The Conference of the Parties to CITES will once again have to adopt more crucial decisions to protect species threatened by over-exploitation, to which international trade could be contributing.

The European Union must ensure that the Convention continues to be an essential instrument for contributing to the conservation and sustainable management of precious wild flora and fauna resources.

The Presidency, working together with the Member States and the Commission, will attend the Doha conference in this spirit, and will work constructively to ensure its success.

I am waiting to hear your points of view, ladies and gentlemen, on the objectives that need to be defended at this next 15th Conference of the Parties to CITES, which I will pass on to the Council. I know that the Council has the support of Parliament for participating in this conference with the common objective that the CITES Convention should continue to make a significant contribution to the sustainability of our planet, for our own benefit, and for the benefit of future generations.

Paweł Samecki, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, the forthcoming 15th Conference of the Parties indeed offers a unique window of opportunity to improve the conservation and status of a wide number of species affected by trade.

The European Union is one of the major markets for wildlife products. Therefore, it has a specific responsibility to ensure that wildlife trade is sustainable and that robust international rules are adopted within the CITES Convention to that effect.

It is a priority for the Commission to make sure that international trade is not detrimental to the survival of endangered plants and animal species. In this respect, the EU has been playing a leading role within CITES and will continue to do so at the next meeting. The Commission will, in the coming days, adopt a proposal for the EU position in view of this meeting. The common EU position will then be adopted by the Council.

In its discussions with the Member States, the Commission will make sure that the final common position supports ambitious and science-based measures. I would also like to thank Parliament for its position on the most salient issues which will be discussed at the CITES Conference of Parties. This resolution sends a clear message which we will need to take into consideration.

While the detailed position of the European Union has not been finalised yet, I can explain the principles and priorities which will guide our decisions on the most sensitive issues to be discussed in Doha.

In the first place, the European Union considers that CITES is an appropriate instrument to regulate trade in all species which are affected by trade. This is the case for terrestrial as well as for marine species and for species subject to important commercial interests or not.

In that vein, the European Union has tabled proposals to regulate trade in two shark species: porbeagle and spiny dogfish. It is of the utmost importance that sharks at last receive the protection they deserve after decades of overfishing.

A listing under CITES Appendix II would put an end to unregulated international trade in shark products which is one of the key drivers of their exploitation. With such listing, trade in those shark products will only take place if they stem from sustainable managed stocks.

The European Union is also proposing to arrange for the protection afforded by CITES to the tiger, which is one of the most endangered species in the world. 2010 is the international year for tigers and is a perfect opportunity to strengthen the current mechanisms in CITES to allow for a merciless fight against illegal trade in this species and improved transparency in range states on how the tiger populations are conserved.

I would also like to touch upon some of the other important proposals which Parliament has also clearly identified. The first is Atlantic bluefin tuna. I have to repeat here that there is no final position on this issue. What I can tell you is that there is concern within the Commission on the current state of the stock and that we are working hard to find an appropriate proposal that will help properly address this problem at the international level. The final Commission position will take account of the latest scientific information on the stock and of the outcome of the meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna which took place in November last year.

The second is elephants and the ivory trade. This has been a longstanding, contentious issue within CITES, especially among African countries themselves. The Commission is very worried about the high level of poaching for elephants and illegal ivory trade which has been observed recently.

The protection afforded to elephants needs to be reinforced, and the Commission will not support solutions which would present a risk of increasing poaching. In that context, we believe that it would not be appropriate that the next Conference of Parties agrees on a resumption of the commercial ivory trade.

We also consider that proposals submitted to CITES with a view to downlisting some elephant populations from CITES Appendix I to Appendix II need to be assessed objectively on the basis of the rules agreed within CITES.

Allow me now to say a few words about the proposal by the USA related to the prohibition of the international trade in polar bears. We are all aware that the ice melting in the Arctic is a dramatic threat for the survival of this species. This needs to be addressed first and foremost via a very ambitious policy on climate change and I think that the EU has clearly shown the way to go in the matter. We also believe that it is worth checking how any additional threat to this species might be mitigated. International trade is limited but might exacerbate the pressure on the species. Our final position will depend on how the measure proposed by the United States provides real benefits for the conservation of a species.

Finally, on the question of corals, there is no doubt that red and pink corals have been overharvested in many regions of the world. At the last CITES meeting in 2007, the European Union backed a proposal by the United States to regulate international trade in both species and we have again cosponsored a USA proposal for COP15. I believe that the European Union should be consistent in this support as the new information available does not show any improvement in the situation. I would also like to stress that such regulation would by no means result in the prohibition of trade but would just make sure that trade is possible when it is sustainable.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ROUČEK

Vice-President

Sirpa Pietikäinen, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, with regard to CITES decision making, I am a firm believer that the decision-making procedure should be transparent and it should be purely based on sound scientific facts. That is behind Parliament's resolution concerning polar bears, elephants, tigers, big Asian cats and sharks.

With particular regard to the question of listing bluefin tuna on Appendix I of the CITES convention, I would like to raise a couple of issues. Firstly, a broad majority of the scientific community agrees with the need for a ban on international trade to ensure the future existence of the species. According to ICCAT, the current spawning stock biomass is less than 15% of what it was before fishing began. From these scientific estimates, it follows that there is a very realistic fear that spawners might become virtually extinct by 2012.

A majority of the FAO ad hoc expert advisory panel considered that the available evidence supported the proposal to include Atlantic bluefin tuna in CITES Appendix I, and further stated that the listing would at least ensure that recent unsustainable catches in the east Atlantic and Mediterranean were reduced. Due to the fact that the panel needs to take unanimous decisions, and due to heavy resistance from Japan, this was not the panel's final suggestion. However, the view of the unquestionable majority of the panel cannot be disregarded. Furthermore, on the basis of scientists' decisions, it clearly concluded that the criteria for the inclusion of bluefin tuna in the CITES Appendix I have been met.

This is a matter of political opinion in several cases but, on the matter of biodiversity and extinctions, we cannot compromise and we cannot haggle. When there are no fish, there is no catch.

Kriton Arsenis, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (EL) Mr President, Mr Leinen has covered everything else I wanted to say, so I shall focus mainly on the question of tuna.

We really do need to look at this issue from a scientific point of view. Bluefin tuna is in immediate danger of extinction. That is why absolute protection from global trade, in other words, trade outside the European Union, is the only appropriate solution. The CITES Secretariat announced last week that it proposes including listing tuna in Appendix I, which means a ban on global trade.

It said, and I quote: 'the Secretariat concurs with the majority of the FAO ad hoc expert advisory panel that these species meet the criteria for inclosing appendix I'. In other words, it supports this proposal in the corresponding FAO proposal, which is based on the ICCAT proposal.

So the scientific part of the debate has been resolved. Now let us examine it from a political and social perspective. Tuna stocks are collapsing. Scientific agencies maintain that, if global trade is not banned, in a few years there will be no bluefin tuna. The regulation of fisheries has so far failed to deliver. Instead of 19 000 tonnes of bluefin tuna, as proposed by the ICCAT for 2008, it is estimated that 50 000 tonnes were caught.

We propose that the global trade should be stopped today, while we still have time to save tuna, that trade should continue within the European Union, which is not affected by CITES and, at the same time, that the European Union should compensate fishermen and undertakings affected by the ban on exports.

The S&D Group has tabled an amendment to this effect. It will allow stocks of bluefin tuna to recover and trade to resume. In this direction, by way of exception, provision has been made to allow the ban on global trade to be lifted as soon as tuna stocks have recovered, rather than gradually, as provided for other species. If global trade is not banned, then stocks of bluefin tuna will collapse, the fisheries sector will go under and then no one will be entitled to compensation.

If we truly want to protect fishermen, we must support the inclusion of bluefin tuna in Appendix I to the CITES Convention. Otherwise, jobs and a beautiful and unique species will be lost forever.

Chris Davies, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, today is supposed to represent a new start for Europe, but what have we here? We have a Commissioner and a Minister just going through the motions. No fault to you, Commissioner, but please go back to the College and say we need to debate with the Commissioners responsible for the briefs in question.

It is almost as shameful as this resolution before us, which just highlights species after species facing extinction: a real reflection of mankind's failure to plan for the future. Of course, this issue of bluefin tuna, which no doubt will dominate the debate, really highlights the issue, it focuses it, and it is, of course, a species purely in European waters. The most expensive fish in the world, each one selling for tens of thousands of euros. Japan is stockpiling en masse. Japan, where apparently the word 'conservation' actually means buy en masse, kill the fish, and freeze them for 20 or 30 years so that they can be eaten in a couple of decades time. There will be no fish left in the Mediterranean by then, but people will still be able to eat sushi if they can afford the bill.

This is a case where even organised crime is involved in the fishing industry, and it is not surprising when so much money is to be made. The Mafia gets involved in this business. And then you look at ICCAT, the

International Council for the Conservation of Tuna. 'Conservation of tuna! Species have dropped by 80 to 90%. We are facing extinction and you have a body which is set up supposedly to look after the tuna! It has failed completely. The targets which it has set itself will fail completely. It ignores scientific advice; it keeps setting quotas far, far too high. Now some Members will say Appendix II is enough, but there is no evidence of that. Appendix II will make no difference. They will come back in a few years' time and say, 'Sorry, got it wrong'. There will be no tuna left.

So let us back the proposal that this fish be cited on Appendix I. Let us just remember it is time we tried to control mankind's greed; it is time we tried to give a bit of thought to the future of our seas.

Bart Staes, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (NL) The way in which humans deal with natural resources, the way in which humans destroy habitats and overexploit wild plants and animal species, the way in which humans illegally trade in wild fauna and flora, all of this represents an ongoing attack on the biodiversity of spaceship Earth.

That very biodiversity is crucial. This explains the importance of CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) and it is why the conference next month in Doha is so important. We have a strong resolution in front of us. However, we must concede that attempts are being made to weaken that resolution behind the scenes. A fierce battle is being fought over this. That is why I ask everyone, especially my fellow Members from southern countries, from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, to ensure most emphatically that the recommendation of the Commission's environmental policy to include bluefin tuna in CITES Appendix 1 be adopted. This is crucial for the survival of this species.

Kartika Tamara Liotard, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (NL) Mr Leinen, many thanks; you have said it all, we can talk about very many animals: the elephant, the Asian tiger, coral. However, I want to pay specific attention to just one.

Yesterday, Blijdorp Zoo in Rotterdam announced that not a single European zoo has managed to breed polar bears. The European breeding programmes for polar bears are unsuccessful and that is very bad news, mainly because the polar bear is threatened with extinction in the wild. The sea ice is shrinking and the polar bear's habitat is gradually being lost. More than 70% of the polar bear population in the wild may disappear within 45 years. In addition, the polar bear is also threatened by trophy hunting and trading. People apparently get a kick from shooting polar bears for fun, which I find truly repulsive.

That is why I am calling on the EU to support the proposal for a ban on the commercial trade in polar bears before it is too late; the bluefin tuna also belongs in Appendix 1 without further ado.

Anna Rosbach, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (DA) Mr President, we are here today to talk about endangered species. We are talking about sharks, tuna, polar bears, big cats and elephants. We are talking about fishing quotas, conservation, maintaining habitats, and so on and so forth. We are talking about whether these animals should be listed in Appendix I or II, or whether they are simply expendable.

We have at least two sides represented in this House, with differing attitudes. One side wants the total conservation of a long list of species that are on the verge of extinction. The other side cannot get the fishing and consumption quotas high enough and promises local fishermen short-sighted fishing rights that will result in the total eradication of certain species within a short space of time.

We need a well-balanced middle path which ensures that we and our planet can continue to thrive in the future. The documents we have here are full of so many technical details that one might get the impression that we were all specialists in this area. Should we not spend our time instead on together preventing fish and shellfish being fished during their breeding periods in general, on ensuring that animals, plants and seas remain viable food providers long into the future, on giving the animals that we eat a reasonable life for their species before they are humanely slaughtered?

Our thinking is too short-term and we are not thinking of the biodiversity that our planet needs. It is not just about endangered flora and fauna; this is a far more complex issue. There is plenty to get on with – and how unusual it would be if we were to start taking preventive action instead of reacting at the last moment.

Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu (NI). – (RO) The statistics show that bluefin tuna is fished in quantities which far exceed the permitted levels, which means that the bluefin tuna population is dwindling with every year that passes. The proposal put forward by Monaco to include bluefin tuna in Appendix 1 of CITES may prove

to be beneficial, given that this species is condemned to extinction unless urgent drastic measures are taken to protect it.

In 1992, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna adopted the recommendation on monitoring the trade in bluefin tuna. Unfortunately, this has turned out to be a far from effective instrument. In 2007, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna adopted a much more comprehensive programme known as the 'Blue Tuna Catch Documentation Programme', which came into force in spring 2008. Although this marks a step forward, it is still too early to give an assessment of this programme's effectiveness. As a result, I feel obliged to ask the following: to what extent can the position of the European Union in favour of including bluefin tuna in Appendix 1 offset, as part of the CITES conference, the desire of certain bodies and states which are not members of the European Union to adopt a standby policy until the hypothetical results of the recent initiatives from the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna can be assessed?

Elisabetta Gardini (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I have heard the Minister describe CITES as an effective instrument and the Commission describe it as an appropriate instrument.

I agree. So let us not change this instrument which, up to now, contrary to what many Members have said, has worked very well indeed. Since tuna fishing was regulated and since lower quotas were set, fishermen have started to see not only more tuna, but also larger tuna.

The instrument works. Including in Appendix I, which concerns species that are genuinely endangered, a species that still numbers – thank God – millions of living specimens would set a very dangerous precedent.

We are waiting for the new figures and it is on those figures that I hope we will base our regulations since, as a famous American journalist said, 'figures don't lie, but liars figure', and how they lie! We are accustomed, especially on the environmental issue, to hearing wildly inconsistent figures: there will be some figures that lie and some that do not lie.

The bluefin tuna is not facing extinction, but the bluefin tuna needs to be regulated. Let us remember that there are entire communities that survive on this ancient activity, which dates back at least 11 200 years, so much so that in some cases, UNESCO considers it an activity to be preserved and promoted.

Edite Estrela (S&D). – (PT) Mr President, the UN states that biological diversity is currently experiencing its worst crisis since the dinosaurs became extinct 65 million years ago. The destruction of coral reefs in the tropics, the growing desertification in Africa and deforestation threaten biodiversity and are having negative impacts on many sectors of the economy, such as food production, tourism, the pharmaceutical industry and energy production.

The UN also recognises that there has been a failure to achieve the target, set in 2002, of reducing the present rate of loss of biological diversity by 2010. CITES constituted the principal global agreement on the conservation of wild species with the aim of avoiding the over-exploitation of species of wild fauna and flora by international trade. The human consumption of natural resources, the destruction of habitats, climate change, the over-exploitation of wild species and illicit trade constitute the principal causes of the impoverishment of biodiversity.

It is therefore important to guarantee that, in the International Year of Biodiversity, the fundamental strategic objectives of the European Union in the context of the forthcoming Conference of the Parties to CITES will address the objective of protecting biological diversity, something which is fundamental for the well-being and survival of humanity.

We must be ambitious and demand the protection of all species threatened with extinction.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE). – (NL) I could talk about all the species on the agenda of the CITES conference at the end of March, but I want to highlight one, just because it so perfectly represents what we as a species are currently engaged in: the bluefin tuna.

This is a magnificent, impressive fish, which has been fished for centuries and which we have eaten for centuries. Unfortunately, this fish is now on the point of dying out. After years of mismanagement by politicians, who ignored biological recommendations time after time, who allowed short-term economic interests to prevail over the long-term perspectives of the sector, we now have no choice other than to totally ban the trade in bluefin tuna.

There are amendments on the table proposing a course of action other than banning the trade, but it is too late for that, unfortunately. A few weeks ago, EUR 120 000 was paid for a single bluefin tuna. That is the current reality. It also explains the enormous illegal catches which are estimated to be twice the size of the set quotas. That is why quotas do not offer any comfort. They make no sense, as a result of the illegal catch. The only salvation for the bluefin tuna is an international trade ban.

I know that the consequences for the sector will be hard, I fully realise that, but let us learn from this experience: when the sea is empty, things really will be over for the sector. Therefore, let us deal more carefully with our environment, for economic reasons as well as ecological ones.

I call upon the European Commission to quickly present the decision to the Council in order to place the bluefin tuna in Appendix 1 and I ask the Spanish Presidency to step out of its own shadow and to adopt that decision.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the seventeenth century, humans exterminated the dodo. Let us humans show that we have the ability to learn and avoid the bluefin tuna becoming the dodo of the 21st century.

Bas Eickhout (Verts/ALE). – (NL) There is another UN summit in March, this time on the trade in threatened animal species. It is the opportunity for the EU to speak with one voice again and, above all, for science to play an important role. Let us look at what the science tells us. Opting for short-term interests may mean opting for short-term interests for fishermen and hunters, but in the long term, this means the end of animal species as well as the end of many sectors.

The alternative is opting for the long term; in the case of the bluefin tuna, we are talking about 2012! That is not the long term, that is tomorrow. You must thus follow the recommendations of the European Parliament on a ban on the trade in bluefin tuna, but also ban the trade in polar bears and, moreover, have the African elephant placed on the said list in order to prevent it being increasingly hunted again.

Finally, there will also be a delegation from the European Parliament in Doha. My wish is that the EP delegation will also play its part in determining the EU's position, so that, together, we can ensure that these animal species are saved for our future.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to ask the Spanish Presidency to indeed preserve bluefin tuna, but also to preserve the traditional Mediterranean *almadraba* fishing methods. These methods, which have coexisted with bluefin tuna for more than a thousand years, have never endangered it. What is really endangering bluefin tuna is illegal fishing, industrial fishing, seine fishing and the proliferation of farms.

This is the real problem for bluefin tuna. We should not be unfair: we need to be able to differentiate what is really endangering bluefin tuna, which is this type of industrial fishing – seine fishing – from traditional fishing methods.

The policy needs to be fair, and therefore we need to seek a path that does preserve tuna but that does not, of course, punish these traditional fishing methods. I think that is the perfect balance which, at times, is impossible to achieve, but we need to try to find this path so that we can preserve this species and ensure that it does not become extinct, without punishing the traditional Mediterranean fishing methods such as the *almadraba* technique.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, many cases of the illegal smuggling of endangered animals have been noted in Member States of the European Union. At border checks, customs officials find birds pushed inside bottles and turtles squeezed in between the body and upholstery of cars. According to a report of the Polish Customs Service, in 2008, a record number of as many as 200 889 live specimens of protected animals and products made from protected animals were intercepted at the border. In India, an inept fight against smugglers has led to a situation in which a dramatic rise in poaching has once again threatened the population of the Bengal tiger, for example.

The European Union, which has common external borders, should take particular care not to become a market where protected species of animals or plants are smuggled or brought in with impunity. The European Commission should place particular emphasis on an educational campaign and appropriate communication with citizens. The objective of this policy should be to raise the awareness of European tourists. For every year, customs officials find products made from specimens of disappearing animal and plant species in the suitcases of Europeans returning from foreign trips. The debate currently under way on the population of bluefin tuna is most certainly justified. The statistics speak for themselves. Over the last 50 years, the population of this species has fallen by as much as 75%. Stocks of tuna in the Mediterranean Sea are also

gravely threatened. Inclusion of the bluefin tuna in Appendix I to the CITES convention would appear to be fully justified and the only way to prevent its becoming extinct.

Antolín Sánchez Presedo (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I share the concern regarding the biological situation of the population of bluefin tuna, and I agree with the need to adopt effective conservation and management measures that not only prevent it from collapsing, but also guarantee the sustainability of fisheries and responsible trade.

My country has been working towards this for years. In addition to the age-old example of *almadraba* fishing techniques, it has created a protection zone in the Mediterranean, it has limited the seine fleet to six vessels, and has been pioneering in terms of adopting a recovery plan for the species and documented monitoring of trade.

Incorporating bluefin tuna into Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) would ban international trade without solving the underlying problems. The volume of catches is not limited, fishing flags can be switched to consumer countries, and it is a step outside of the recent agreements by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), the regional fisheries management organisation responsible for managing this fishery. It would therefore weaken international governance of the seas and the principle of responsible fishing.

We need to get to the root of the problems. We advocate the reduction in catches already agreed in the ICCAT, and even a moratorium if it is determined by the scientific reports that are under way for the next season. We want the European Union to strengthen its use of controls and fulfil the ICCAT recommendations for ensuring the traceability of catch processes and sales.

This line of action is compatible with the integration of bluefin tuna into Appendix 2 of CITES, but it cannot be reconciled with Appendix 1, which should be reserved for a different scenario and not be subject to conditions that would erode its credibility as a CITES instrument.

In any case, this debate must send out a clear message: the European Union is completely committed to the sustainability of bluefin tuna, and will adopt the necessary measures to preserve it. The industry must demonstrate that quotas work and are applied, and that illegal fishing can be controlled.

In order to save fishing, we need to save the species.

Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE). – (GA) Mr President, the condition of the bluefin tuna stock in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean is a source of worry for us all. The scientific information cannot be disputed. However, ICCAT – the international commission responsible for conserving bluefin tuna and for restoring and conserving the stock – has made tremendous efforts. If the bluefin tuna is listed in Appendix I of CITES, bluefin tuna fishing will be completely banned for at least ten years.

To treat the fishing industry in Europe in this way is unacceptable. It is vitally important that ICCAT is allowed to do its job.

For example, in 2006, the total allowable catch was 36 000 tonnes. The total allowable catch for this year has been reduced to 13 500 tonnes. In 2011, as ICCAT have proposed, this will undergo a reduction of at least 50% to under 6 750 tonnes. Further reductions in the total allowable catches will occur in 2012 and 2013.

The measures undertaken by ICCAT must be carefully monitored. If they are proven to be unsuccessful, then a total ban under Appendix I must be considered.

From an Irish perspective – and let me say that we have no vested interest apart from the fact that we have a bycatch of 100 tonnes of bluefin tuna – are we to catch bluefin tuna by way of a bycatch, and when they are caught and killed to put them back into the sea? That is certainly not a sensible way to proceed. I believe it is important to take sensible and realistic measures to protect both stocks and the fishing sector in Europe.

While there are people here who are most anxious to protect tuna, let me say to those people who might come from rural areas depending on fishing, you must also think of the other endangered species – that is, our fishermen.

Therefore, I will be voting for the amendment to include bluefin tuna under Appendix II.

Isabella Lövin (Verts/ALE). – (SV) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, look around you in this Chamber. The empty seats can be seen as representing all the predatory fish that have disappeared from the world's seas in the space of around 50 years. The world's fishing fleets have succeeded in emptying the planet of the predatory fish that are so important for ecosystems. These include tuna, cod and salmon. The EU is the second largest fishing nation in the world and our responsibility for the depletion of fish stocks is indisputable.

In the years 2000-2008, for example, the EU fisheries fund paid more than EUR 23 million towards the building of new tuna fishing vessels – in other words, to an industry that also costs taxpayers millions every year in surveillance in order to reduce illegal fisheries; and all so that 70% of the fish can be exported to Japan to be eaten at exclusive business dinners!

I would like to remind you all that listing the bluefin tuna in Appendix I of the CITES Convention does not mean that small-scale fishery in Europe will be banned, but will merely bring to an end exports that are heavily subsidised by taxpayers. It would make a good start to the UN's International Year of Biodiversity.

Catherine Soullie (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, today there remains less than 15% of the original bluefin tuna stock. In the face of such figures, the solution seems obvious. Nevertheless, we should not forget about the jobs affected by the decision that we are discussing today. It should be pointed out that the aim of the CITES is not to prohibit fishing but merely the international trade in this type of fish, 80% of which is exported to Japan.

By protecting tuna, we are certainly protecting an endangered species, but we are also encouraging the continuation of a more balanced and sustainable fishing activity, one that is destined for our internal market and which generates employment. I am in favour of the idea of listing bluefin tuna in Appendix I of the CITES and, while I believe that this decision will be positive, the help of the Commission will be crucial, since it will mean that the fisheries sector can be completely overhauled.

My question therefore concerns the conditions of this support. France is requesting an 18-month extension accompanied by financial measures for those fishermen and ship-owners affected by a trade ban. What is the Commission's view on the subject?

Moreover, I, like many of my colleagues, am concerned about fairness. How can we guarantee that boats flying the flag of countries such as Tunisia, Libya and so on will apply the international trade ban as rigorously as we do? What will the new control and penalty measures consist of?

Our policy of having sustainable economic activities has to be practical, and sometimes even unpopular in certain sectors, but I hope that the Commission and the Council do not lose sight of the adjustments needed in order to implement these measures.

Guido Milana (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I support – and I have also tabled amendments in this regard – the inclusion of bluefin tuna in Appendix II. Supporting this certainly does not make me feel like a criminal. On the contrary, I feel very much on the same wavelength as those who, before me, starting with Mrs Gardini, upheld a different position.

It is deeply flawed to put tigers, polar bears, elephants and tuna on equal terms. The FAO would never allow itself to say anything different or to support a different position for these other endangered species. Holding a different view on how to manage the tuna issue certainly does not mean forgetting that biodiversity is a value that must be defended at all costs.

The spirit of the motion for a resolution is absolutely worthy of support. However, at a time when some people seem to be taking a step backwards in terms of estimating tuna biomass in the sea, rapidly moving towards inclusion in Appendix I probably means overlooking the side effects of this choice, which are severe and sometimes irreversible in many sectors of our economy.

In some ways, the same goes for the issue of coral and for its inclusion in Appendix II. Here, too, there is data that does not definitely indicate the extinction or endangerment of deep coral, coral that is at a depth of more than 150-200 metres, which is what is covered by the measure.

Carl Haglund (ALDE). – (SV) Mr President, once upon a time, it was actually possible to fish for bluefin tuna up in my part of the Baltic Sea, but we know what the situation is today. The bluefin tuna is threatened with extinction because of intensive overfishing.

We are having this rather sad debate because the right decision was not made at the right time. We have ended up here because for years now, we decision makers have refused to listen to scientific advice. As a result, we end up in a situation in which drastic action is required. In this connection, let me remind you of previous failures by humanity on this front. The Canadian coast provides a good example of how man succeeded in totally destroying cod stocks. These collapsed entirely because of overfishing, and they had just the same discussion there as we are having here today. We must not allow the bluefin tuna to suffer the same fate. That is why the French proposal, among others, is not a particularly good one, because it could have precisely this effect.

Of course, the fact that half – or nearly all – of the Committee on Fisheries is sitting here also shows that this House does not deal with these issues in the best way; that is to say, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety has discussions and comes up with ideas, and then those of us working on fisheries issues come here and debate them. That is something that we should reflect on. Nonetheless, I think that the Committee's proposal is a good one. It has a sound scientific basis, and there is no reason to change the Committee on the Environment's approach to this issue.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, bluefin tuna has been on red alert for some time, and for years we have been hearing reports that clearly demonstrate that stocks are weak and how we have contributed to this, including through public subsidies. The European Union has been spending up to EUR 34 million on modernisation in recent years.

I think that we have to say this, we have to take responsibility for the situation that we are in. We have driven stocks of bluefin tuna to the brink of collapse, and we cannot say now that we are not responsible in any way. We now have the opportunity to correct this problem by incorporating bluefin tuna into Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and this is the only way that we can do so, because I would like to stress that a lot of people rely on it for their livelihood.

It is true that there are sectors that have done the right thing and can and should continue to do so, but in order for them to do the right thing, there needs to be tuna. If there is no tuna, they are not going to be able to do anything at all. The only guarantee of this is Appendix 1, and therefore any other measure that could clearly counteract this proposal is a bad measure that will prolong the agony, not put an end to it. Therefore, let us not be mistaken, let us not cheat: we have an historical responsibility to this species, and to the people and the families who depend on it for their livelihood. Let us assume our responsibility courageously and with the honour that the European Union is worthy of at this time.

Ioannis A. Tsoukalas (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, my fellow members have already addressed every aspect of this issue. I should like to state that I endorse the positions taken by Mr Milana earlier and to say that we need to bear in mind that including bluefin tuna in Appendix I will have numerous social and economic consequences, such as bankruptcies and the closure of numerous undertakings, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, job losses and a loss of competitiveness for Europe.

We must remember that bluefin tuna feeds a EUR 6 billion global market. I should, in fact, like to hear a few scientifically-backed proposals which are designed to secure the future viability of populations of bluefin tuna, but which also take account of the viability of European fishermen and their families. In my view, the best and most appropriate way is to include it in Appendix II.

Nor must we forget that the European Union is not out fishing on its own, either in the Mediterranean or the Atlantic. Bluefin tuna fishing is a global activity. European fishermen face strong – often unfair – competition from North African countries. Unilateral viability of tuna populations makes no sense. We must ensure that everyone is playing the game by the same rules.

Also, the fact that Japan has 30 000 tonnes of frozen bluefin tuna is perhaps of some interest and the ban may well cause stock prices to rise from USD 10 billion today to USD 20 billion.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D). – Mr President, all elements of this agreement are important but I want to focus on the bluefin tuna issue.

It is vital that we act now to prevent a stock collapse and to allow the numbers of bluefin tuna to recover. In 2006, the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna agreed on an action plan designed to improve reporting and monitoring of stocks and inspection of vessels.

But it is clear that it is not enough. The stocks, particularly the eastern stock in the Mediterranean, remains critically low and there is a very real risk that we will soon witness the extinction of this endangered species.

The Conference of the Parties to CITES should therefore agree to place bluefin tuna in Appendix I of the Convention, and the Member States and the Commission must do more to combat illegal fishing and to enforce agreed restrictions and quotas.

Ramon Tremosa i Balcells (ALDE). – (ES) Mr President, with regard to the possible prohibition of bluefin tuna fishing in the Mediterranean, I am very concerned that legal fishing will end up being pushed out by illegal fishing, and that the innocent will end up paying for the sins of the guilty.

In Catalonia, hundreds of jobs are at stake. The fishing practised there is respectful, fully regulated and monitored, in terms of both fisheries management and trade management.

Since 2006, in the East Atlantic and the Mediterranean, fishing of bluefin tuna has been reduced by 30 000 tonnes to 13 500 tonnes. The minimum size of fish has increased from 10 to 30 kilos, and an 11-month fishing season has become an 11-month closed season.

Finally, I do not think there is a consensus between the international specialists regarding the threat of extinction of bluefin tuna. If populations are compared between 1970 and 2010, which is when there is monitoring data, the population of bluefin tuna is above 15%. It is between 21% and 30%, therefore clearly above the 15% for Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Carmen Fraga Estévez (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, I would also like to talk about commercial fishing species, and I would like to make it very clear that regional fisheries organisations are already responsible for managing and conserving these species. In fact, one only has to skim through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to realise that it is perhaps designed for elephants and polar bears, but it is not, of course, designed for commercial fishing species.

I am not against protecting bluefin tuna, as that would be absurd, if only because of its importance to the fleet. I do, however, think that the measures need to be decided by bodies that have the best specialists in both managing fisheries and scientific research, because there is a reason why the CITES has to take external advice when it receives proposals on these species.

I therefore think that the proposal to include bluefin tuna in Appendix 1 of CITES is unnecessary and unjustified, because it already has the measures imposed by International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT). It is unfair, because it would gratuitously damage a fleet that has just embarked on a huge drive to reduce fishing, and even counterproductive, because it could give rise to an uncontrollable black market in bluefin tuna.

I understand the enormous pressure that public opinion in general and this House in particular – as we are seeing – is experiencing from environmental NGOs. My political group has therefore decided to support inclusion in Appendix II as a compromise between the proposal of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and those of us who think that fisheries management cannot be snatched away from regional fisheries organisations. Our proposal is indeed based on the scientific advice to CITES. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) has recommended that bluefin tuna only be included in Appendix II of CITES, which demonstrates that many people have not even read the FAO report.

Catherine Bearder (ALDE). – Mr President, I welcome the assurances we have been given here this evening that the EU will not support any proposals which would lead to an increase in illegal ivory poaching, yet I am dismayed to hear that the Commission then goes on to state that any proposals to downgrade the African elephant from CITES Appendix I to Appendix II need to be assessed objectively on the basis of the rules laid down by CITES.

These two statements are in direct contradiction to each other. Any discussion of relaxing the protection afforded to elephants under the CITES Convention will send a green light to poachers in the hope that soon there will be a market for their illegal and cruelly acquired goods.

Zambia and Tanzania are in violation of the Convention as they did not consult all the elephant range states as required in Resolution 9.24 of the CITES criteria for amendments. We expect the Commission and Council to ensure that the constitution of CITES, and the agreed moratorium, are respected. How do they intend to prevent the illegal proposals from Tanzania and Zambia from being placed on the agenda in the very first place?

Antonello Antinoro (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe I can state with sufficient confidence that the speech by the Chair of the Committee on Fisheries, Mrs Fraga Estévez, provided some technical information that either we are pretending not to know, or we probably do not actually know.

She mentioned what the FAO's recommendation is, what the truth is and what is being called for. Everything else is manipulation and conditioning of this Parliament and many Members. I would not want us to forget that policy must be sovereign and that we must keep the influence and pressures of economic groups, which likely want different things, out of this Parliament.

We know that in the last two years, the price of tuna has fallen and we know that we have set restrictions whereby there has already been a reduction of 40%. Going on the basis of studies that none of us is sure are true, everything else is manipulation on the part of economic powers that probably want the exact opposite of what we are seeking, namely to increase the price of tuna beyond all proportion and to see to it that, in the end, the only ones to pay are the small economies of small fishing fleets, on which many regions of this wonderful Europe of ours depend.

Next I would like to recommend that the Commission and the Commissioner – also in view of the fact that the new Commission includes a Minister for Foreign Affairs, now surely more titled than in the past – ensure that agreements are reached with other non-European states so that the ban on bluefin tuna fishing does not apply only to Europe, and seek to control prices, including for non-European countries.

Clearly we support Mrs Fraga Estévez's amendment and all that it entails as far as Appendix II is concerned.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE). – (PT) In November last year, the ICCAT adopted strong measures to restrict catches of Atlantic bluefin tuna: a reduction in catches from 22 000 to 13 500 tonnes in 2010 and a restriction on purse seining between 15 May and 15 June. Ambitious and unprecedented measures, in the words of the then Commissioner, Joe Borg. These decisions were taken in accordance with the latest scientific views on the species and their impact should be evaluated before the end of 2010.

It therefore makes no sense to bring forward new restrictions which will be economically and socially punitive for the sector, especially in the period of serious crisis that it is experiencing, such as those which are equivalent to the inclusion of Atlantic bluefin tuna in Appendix I. The fisheries sector requires a dynamic balance between its three pillars: the environmental, economic and social pillars.

With respect to its environmental requirements, these must be scientifically-grounded, as in fact was the case in the ICCAT meeting given the active participation of the European Union. This being so, to include Atlantic bluefin tuna in Appendix I would constitute a serious precedent of ignoring the need for: first, a scientific basis for the announcement of restrictions; and second, a balance between the environmental, economic and social pillars. It would thus open the door to other decisions taken in an overly swift and biased manner, perverting the norms of responsible management.

Alain Cadec (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the proposal made by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety to list bluefin tuna in Appendix I of the CITES is too radical a measure. I shall therefore make it dependent on three requirements, which I believe allow a fair compromise.

The first concerns the independent scientific opinion that is due to be published in October 2010 and approved by the CITES meeting in September 2011. I believe that this scientific opinion is crucial. We must be certain that the species is genuinely endangered before taking a radical decision on the fishing of and trade in bluefin tuna.

Secondly, it is vital to have a guarantee that Regulation (EC) No 865/2006 on the CITES will be amended, since this will result in a general exemption for the internal trade in bluefin tuna. This amendment will mean that we obtain what we all want: the survival of our small-scale coastal fishing, particularly in the Mediterranean.

Thirdly, I believe that, since we are deciding to include this listing in Appendix I, financial support from the European Union for the fishermen and ship-owners affected by the decisions is essential.

Lastly, this decision, if approved under the conditions that I have just mentioned, will have to be accompanied by significantly stricter controls to combat illegal fishing. It is under these conditions and these conditions only that I can agree to the listing of bluefin tuna in Appendix I of the CITES. Without these assurances, a listing in Appendix II remains the least worst solution, if not, in fact, the best solution.

Esther de Lange (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, we cannot permit ourselves to ignore the loss of biodiversity. Those could have been my words, but they are those of the European Commission, of the Commissioner for the Environment, Mr Dimas, to be precise, during the presentation last month of a communication on biodiversity.

I assume that the new Commission sees this in just the same way and considers the importance of biodiversity just as seriously. If not, then I would like to be told that. Precisely because of the involvement of the European Commission in biodiversity, it surprises me that it is the Commission that is doing everything to save species and to push back the loss of biodiversity on the one hand, while the same Commission does not – or does not yet – have the courage to simply propose adding an endangered species such as the bluefin tuna to CITES Appendix I. That sounds like two sides of the same coin. Of course, we must financially support fishermen who work in good faith in order to pass this intervention. On that point, I agree with the previous speaker. In addition, we must deal more firmly with the illegal catch of tuna.

However, ladies and gentlemen of the Commission, I would go one step further. For me, CITES and, in particular, the bluefin tuna, is a test case. A test case to establish whether you, the Commission, are in a position to follow up your words with action. A test case to see whether this new Commission can show leadership or whether it will permanently lend a willing ear to the Member States, who, as we know, will not agree on this, and whether it can avoid getting bogged down in wordings and communications, but will instead actually take action.

I have just cited your words; you say you are prepared to do this, so it is now time to move from words to deeds, and I would say to the Commission: start with the bluefin tuna.

Simon Busuttil (PPE). – (MT) If we permit the fishermen to do as they please, then we will be contributing to the depletion and extermination of tuna stocks. Similarly, however, Mr President, if we place a total ban on the trade in tuna, then we would be destroying the fishermen, the fishing community, their families and the community that depends on them.

I believe that these are two extremes: neither should we annihilate tuna stocks nor should we destroy the sector that relies completely on it. However between these two extremes there is a path that we can take, that leads to a compromise. There is the path whereby one can control the fishing sector much more than was previously done without closing it down completely.

Therefore, I believe that placing tuna in Appendix I of the CITES Convention is an extreme measure that should be avoided. We would be better off following what ICCAT is proposing, as it has been reducing quotas for fish catches for years. However, in order to reach a compromise, we could also place it in Appendix II of the CITES Convention.

Mr President, in order to avoid the depletion of tuna stocks, we do not need to put an end to the many fishermen that depend upon them. It is possible to reconcile these two.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, if you will pardon the pun, I think this is a Catch-22 situation for many of us because, if we ban the catching of fish, and particularly of bluefin tuna, fishermen will go out of existence. If we do not ban it, then there will be nothing to catch.

I think one of the key elements here – and it is constantly coming up in many of our debates – is the scientific evidence. People have said that the scientific evidence is not reliable enough, it is not extensive enough and it is not up-to-date enough.

I would like to ask the Commission and the Council: are they happy with the scientific evidence that is being produced? Because you can quote scientific evidence but then somebody might come along with a different example of a recommendation from other scientists.

So I think that is a key element in this, and I would like to hear what the Commission and the Council have to say about it.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE). – (ES) Mr President, today we have heard illegal fishing being confused with mafias, and I also want to speak out in favour of a sector that has demonstrated on many occasions that it is responsible.

I advocate the need to control fishing. I also advocate the need to control mafias. This cannot, however, be a reason for including bluefin tuna in Appendix I.

I must also say that the Basque fishing fleet, which is going to be significantly affected by this decision, if it is taken, has demonstrated that it is very responsible, because in order to defend the sector, on occasions it has asked for fishing to be suspended in other fisheries, for example, anchovies.

I also have to say that we should listen to what the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) says since, in 2009, it adopted more restrictive and stronger management measures in line with the recommendations of the Scientific Committee.

I would like to point out that for 2010, a fishing quota of 3 500 tonnes has been decided. In 2009, it was 22 000 tonnes and in 2006, it was 32 000 tonnes. Therefore, the compromise was made to implement new control measures if necessary.

I am not in favour of the inclusion of bluefin tuna in Appendix I, as it could damage many sectors, including the small-scale sector, which has not been considered today. We should therefore only support its inclusion in the event that these measures are not effective.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, as a European from the Alpine region, allow me to move from the water back to the land. I would like the Commission to take a request to Doha concerning the proposal for an identity marking requirement. As we know, bred birds of prey – I am thinking specifically of falcons – are subject to an identity marking requirement when traded. The animals are registered, ringed or, in the case of larger animals, tagged with chips so that they can be identified if necessary. Without this identity marking, there can be no trade.

Thus, the point I would like to make is that for other species of animals that are endangered or bred, like the lynx in Central Europe, for example, there is no such requirement. Thus, it can happen that free-roaming, escaped or traded animals are not identity marked and it is not possible to identify them precisely. That is bad, both for behaviour research and for stock level research, and, of course, it also makes illegal trade easier. I therefore propose that this identity marking be taken to Doha as a useful contribution to the debate.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – Mr President, I came to the Chamber to be educated, or at least I hoped that would happen, because there are two very valid sides to this debate, in particular, concerning bluefin tuna.

The first point I would make is that we have spoken about illegal fishing practices, and it seems to me that illegal practitioners do not care about what appendix anything is in. They will continue unless we have effective policing of these rules and regulations.

On the one hand, we can see some of the logic for an Appendix I classification, but there are socio-economic issues. I think we need to focus on the results.

There is the issue of discards and the impact of an Appendix I categorisation on this matter for fishermen. I am inclined to the view – but will be talking to colleagues later to discuss it within our group – that it should not be classified in Appendix I, and perhaps Appendix II is the place. It goes to show that even with the length and quality of this debate, there is still some confusion, in my mind at least.

Giovanni La Via (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in view of the controversial scientific data that we have heard from several parties and in view of a stock level that is certainly not yet, not even in the worst-case scenario, such as to warrant compulsory inclusion in Appendix I, I do not believe that such a restrictive measure, even with the limitations that clearly would be placed on certain territories in terms of fishing, is the best solution.

Also, in the light of the efforts that have been made in recent years towards reducing the level of fishing by specialist tuna fishing companies, in my view, we need to continue in this direction, keeping tuna in Appendix II and avoiding rushing ahead, which would be extremely dangerous for some territories and for companies in the sector.

Silvia Iranzo Gutiérrez, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) First of all, I would like to thank all of you for your speeches, which I have found to be very useful for contributing to shaping the common position that the European Union should take to the next Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The vast majority have highlighted the validity of the CITES in terms of helping to conserve species that are in danger of extinction.

As I said at the beginning, after the Commission has made its proposal to the Council, the Council will be able to shape its position at CITES with regard to the different items on the agenda for the meeting relating

to the main endangered species. For example, people have talked about tigers and about elephants – Mrs Bearder – about polar bears – Mrs Liotard – but the vast majority of the speeches have referred to the case of bluefin tuna. Regarding this issue, we have heard a variety of opinions based on a variety of arguments.

The Council is, of course, aware of the results of the last meeting of the Scientific Committee of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) in October 2009, and also the recommendations of the FAO panel of independent experts in December 2009. The Council is therefore fully aware of the implications of the proposal to include tuna in the appendices of CITES, and not only for the conservation of the species, but also for the survival of the traditional fishing methods of some fisheries that have demonstrated that they are sustainable for the species. The Council will therefore carefully evaluate all of the issues before adopting its position.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the thanks of the Presidency-in-Office of the Council to you for your speeches and contributions during this decisive phase for shaping the European Union's position for the next CITES conference, and I will be delighted to pass on the content of your speeches to the Council along with your great interest in the issues that are going to be discussed in Doha. I would also like to convey to you the commitment of the Spanish Presidency to ensuring the conservation and sustainable development of endangered species. We know that the Council has Parliament's full support in this.

Paweł Samecki, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, my first general remark is to say that I really appreciate the contribution of all the speakers concerning all the objectives ahead of discussions at the conference.

I can assure you that the Commission will be in favour of sustainable trade for the benefits of both biodiversity and the communities which need to live in harmony with the species concerned.

Now, a few more specific comments in relation to your remarks; first of all, as I explained, the overall position of the Commission on bluefin tuna will be adopted very soon. This is an important matter because it relates mainly to the catches by the EU fishing fleets. It has been felt that it is more appropriate that, instead of the outgoing Commission, the new Commission takes a clear position on this issue because the new Commission will be in charge of defending or promoting the EU position at the conference.

I am really confident that this proposal will ensure a sustainable future for both this species and the associated fishing industry. This will need to balance short-term and long-term perspectives on this issue. But, on more specific items and the questions raised by the distinguished Members of Parliament, on the question of support which could potentially be given to the fishermen affected, I think that we should stress that the Commission would be ready to assess the possibility of providing such support to the maximum possible extent, but we also need to remember that budgetary reallocations have been decided for many years and that we would also need to assess the financial consequences while we have a rigid financial budget for the perspective 2007-2013.

There is one specific issue concerning the proposal to include bluefin tuna in Appendix II and I think it is important to note that there are very specific provisions in CITES which would apply in the case of an Appendix II. There would be a lot of legal and technical discussions on what such a listing in Appendix II would actually mean. The practical impact of such a listing would be uncertain. That is why we need to think of what the practical consequences of putting bluefin tuna in Appendix II would be.

Regarding Mrs Bearder's question on elephants, there are procedural weaknesses in the motions of Tanzania and Zambia but in our legal assessment, these flaws cannot be sufficient ground to procedurally reject these motions *ex ante*.

Finally, I will comment on Mr Kelly's question. Is the Commission happy with scientific evidence on many issues? I think it is difficult for the Commission to question scientific evidence because it would mean that the Commission has better scientific or research capacity than the research institutes, which is not the case. That is why it is sometimes very difficult to take a position on the scientific evidence.

President. – I have received seven motions for resolutions⁽²⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 115(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

(2) See Minutes

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12 noon.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Sergio Berlato (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the debate we are holding today on the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in March is particularly important for the rational use of wild flora and fauna.

The motion for a resolution on the subject seems to be skewed in favour of a ban on the use of many resources. I am referring, in particular, to the proposal to include Mediterranean red coral in CITES Appendix II. I should like to point out that the scientific community feels that there is no threat of extinction to species in the family *Coralliidae*, given the abundance of this species in all waters in which they live. Including coral in Appendix II therefore seems excessive and uncorroborated by scientific data. Trade in red coral is a significant source of income in vast areas of the Mediterranean, and including it in CITES would have significant consequences for the economies of numerous countries, including Italy, with acute public alarm and resulting job losses.

For these reasons, we are against the inclusion of this species family in CITES Appendix II. Furthermore, I would ask the European Commission to review the position it has adopted up to now, which appears to be more the result of excessive environmental extremism than considered scientific analysis.

Clemente Mastella (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Europe has always been attentive to problems associated with the overexploitation of wild species and illegal trade in fauna and flora.

Let us remember, though, that the CITES Convention should base its own decisions on results and on scientific data provided by the appropriate international bodies. Two points are particularly sensitive: the proposal to include the species *Corallium spp.* and *Paracorallium spp.* in Appendix II, and the request to include bluefin tuna in Appendix I.

With regard to coral, we feel it is right to reiterate our opposition in the light of the negative opinion issued by the FAO's scientific assessment panel in mid-December 2009, which showed that there was no data on the decline of the species that would support their inclusion in Appendix II. All that would seriously jeopardise the competitiveness of the coral goods craft industry, which is of major importance in terms of the economy and jobs in some areas of Italy (Torre del Greco in particular, Alghero and Trapani).

As for tuna, there are countries such as France and Italy that are most concerned with bluefin tuna fishing and thus with protecting the species so it can be exploited sustainably. We can support this motion but ask, however, that this inclusion be conditional on the implementation of the decision being deferred for 12-18 months and the provision of compensation for the sector.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Contrary to the impression that some people tend to give, the CITES is not an instrument designed to prohibit trade; rather, its aim is to ensure that the international trade in wild animal and plant species does not threaten their survival. Two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet the Namibian Minister for the Environment and Tourism. By putting an actual monetary value on elephants in Namibia and by thus enabling a strictly regulated elephant trade to be established, the conditions are today in place to manage and to protect against poaching. Thanks to those measures, the number of individual animals belonging to that species – the survival of which is not under threat – has significantly increased. In the light of these points, I encourage you to support the proposal by Tanzania and Zambia to transfer the African elephant from Appendix I to Appendix II of the CITES, and to reject the proposal by Kenya.

Edward Scicluna (S&D), *in writing*. – I strongly believe in sustainable development and do not question that the bluefin tuna (BFT) species is over-exploited and needs protecting. CITES has been successfully used to protect exotic species from extinction, in cases where it is impossible to control innumerable poachers and hunters especially in developing countries. But do we have the same situation here?

The BFT of the north-east Atlantic is being over-exploited by a handful of trawling companies, each catching thousands of tonnes. These trawling companies are from leading EU countries: France, Spain, and Italy. The EU does not need an international environmental body to assist it in controlling the fishing industry practised in its Member States.

Of course, we have to be pragmatic. If international political opinion means we cannot stop BFT from being listed within CITES, let us apply common sense and proportionality by listing the species under Appendix

II, as has been suggested by an FAO expert group. Putting BFT on Appendix I of CITES would cost my country's economy close to 2% of GDP. It is no different than asking to close down the whole salmon industry in Scotland in one swipe. Nearly 1% of the labour force would lose their jobs.

13. Eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the report by Lambert van Nistelrooij, on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development, concerning draft Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (EC) No .../2009, amending Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006, on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities

(COM(2009)0382 - C7-0095/2009 - 2009/0105(COD)) (A7-0048/2009)

Lambert van Nistelrooij, rapporteur. – (NL) The European Parliament is dynamic; from fish and CITES we move onto humans, because it is also important that they, too, are dealt with in a responsible manner. I am glad that we are able to amend the European Regional Development Fund Regulation today in relation to housing people in difficult circumstances, marginalised groups throughout the Union.

I am also glad that we managed to reach agreement last week in the first reading on a whole range of problems that arose in a legal sense within the framework of the Treaty of Lisbon. Together, we have come up with a wording for the first amendment of legislation under the Treaty of Lisbon, the first amendment of legislation in this new parliamentary term. A whole range of other proposals have been blocked, but this proposal will make it. I also thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for the pressure you exerted. Together, we have said, 'This was actually already an agreement under the Treaty of Nice'. However, there was not enough progress. It was linked to other areas, which is why an agreement was not reached under the Swedish Presidency.

There is also talk of a new situation this year, because 2010 is the European year of the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the best year by far to bring this type of instrument into being. Together with others, I have therefore exercised great pressure to have this area completed, and just in time, I would say.

I am also glad and content, however, that the projects that were originally intended for problem groups in urban areas can now also be set up for implementation in rural areas. Furthermore, the arrangement will apply to every country in the European Union.

The idea of cohesion continues to be a combination of social cohesion, economic cohesion and territorial cohesion. In this proposal, the social dimension, social cohesion, is given top billing. Throughout the consultation process, I have also been able to emphasise a number of points, which I will reiterate for you now: 1. expansion to all EU states, to all 27 Member States of the European Union; 2. the criteria of sustainability; and 3. the creation of more specific criteria for the integration of this type of building project into society; many of the present locations do not actually meet the criteria and instead represent bad housing in bad places. Rebuilding in bad places solves nothing. Spending the funds – and we are talking about half a billion euros per year that can be paid within the regional funds – is, in itself, unjustified, if we do not choose good locations; hence, specifying more detailed criteria.

Of course, none of this will solve the problem of the 9 million Roma, but housing is essential, the physical element is important and the Member States can now set about doing something. I ask the European Commission, the outgoing Commissioner, to give an answer to the question of whether we will be informed in more detail about the implementation of the total package and be involved in it.

Finally, in my previous positions, I was responsible, amongst other things, for the problem of caravans in the Netherlands and I have seen how difficult this was to deal with. I have paid visits to Romania and other countries in Eastern Europe and I recognise much of what I saw. I think it really is very good that we are now able to take this decision. Without good housing, good places and supplemental social policy, education and employment, we will not succeed. I am very glad that we are able to do this and I thank everyone for their sound cooperation in recent months.

Paweł Samecki, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, the proposal we are debating today is a tangible sign of the commitment of all EU institutions to promote integration of extremely marginalised and deprived communities into mainstream society. The proposal meets the request of Parliament and of the Council and

confirms that the Structural Funds have a role to play, not only by contributing financially but also by promoting an integrated approach to tackling social and economic conditions of marginalised communities.

The proposal specifically targets the Roma population which, in Europe, accounts for 10 million people. However, in accordance with the common basic principles on Roma inclusion, the proposal does not exclude other marginalised groups sharing similar social economic circumstances.

The current compromise proposal extends housing interventions for marginalised communities to all 27 Member States and not only to the EU-12 as the Commission initially proposed. The existing Article 7 applies only to housing interventions in urban areas, while the amendment proposes that housing interventions also be allowed in rural areas. This extension is justified since the majority of the Roma population in the EU-12 is settled in rural and not in urban areas.

Under the proposed amendment, both the renovation of existing housing and the construction of new houses are eligible. In fact, renovation of houses of extremely poor quality might result in a waste of public resources. During the discussion of the proposal, the Committee on Regional Development asked for a specific reference to desegregation measures. Recital 6 of the proposal now includes such desegregation measures as examples of actions which should go along with housing interventions. Indeed, segregated settlements imply insecurity, no easy access to education or employment, as well as exposure to violent attacks and criminality. The creation of new marginalised areas, although with decent and ERDF-supported houses, is definitively not our objective.

We know that many Member States have put in place integration policies of the Roma communities with particular focus on housing. The implementation of these policies is not an easy task. The Structural Funds can participate in this effort, supporting not only housing but more importantly actions improving the productive capacities of these communities, such as support for SMEs, women, entrepreneurship initiatives, etc.

In this respect, I would like to stress that the main objective of the cohesion policy is to make the regional economies converge by fostering the productive capacities.

As you are certainly aware, the new regulation will be accompanied by a declaration from the Commission – and indeed most Member States – stating that the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities throughout the European Union under the ERDF is of an exceptional nature. This exception should in no way be regarded as a general opening of cohesion policy to financing housing interventions.

I would like now to refer to the proposal by the Committee on Regional Development to insert a specific recital on comitology into the text. In this context, I would like to remind you that a horizontal solution of transitional provisions relating to comitology has, in principle, been found between the three institutions. The aim of the Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission concerning the implementation of Article 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union is to avoid raising institutional discussions on each individual file during the interim period pending the entry into force of a new comitology framework regulation. The Commission therefore regrets the introduction of the recital, but will not block – for this reason – the agreement in first reading between the colegislators.

I am looking forward to the debate.

Jan Olbrycht, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (PL) Mr President, I would like to stress that the amendment to the regulation which is under consideration today is of dual significance. On the one hand, it directly concerns the problems of marginalised societies, even if that term is not very well defined. On the other hand, however, it introduces an element which is also very important for the economy, I mean the possibility of finance from the European Regional Development Fund for the construction of housing, which caused a very serious controversy in the last term of the European Parliament. This is, undoubtedly, a rather surprising effect of the crisis – arguments which MEPs put forward several years ago were rejected, and spending on housing was accepted only for the new Member States, while today, in the light of new economic and financial conditions, there is consent to the use of funds for housing in a highly specific context. I think the experiment which is under way, and which is a very positive element, should be continued, and spending on housing should have a place in future cohesion policy, just as it does today.

Georgios Stavrakakis, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (EL) Mr President, I should like to start by congratulating the rapporteur, Mr van Nistelrooij, who, thanks to his persistence and patience during the last dialogue,

managed to ensure that this important report was tabled for debate today and the vote tomorrow and that we do not waste valuable time by postponing it until March.

The report is extremely important, because it makes provision for the scope of the regulation on the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities to be extended to the entire European Union and not only to the new Member States, as provided for in the European Commission's initial proposal.

It was unthinkable, both for the members of my political group and for our committee, that the old Member States should not be included in this extension to the scope of the regulation, because – as we all know – the housing problems faced by marginalised social groups, especially the Roma, are a serious issue, with social repercussions in all the Member States of the European Union.

We believe that the report and the extension of the scope of housing interventions to the entire European Union strengthens cohesion between all the regions, with no discrimination between old and new Member States. It sends out a clear message that Community funding is based on the principle of combating social problems, regardless of the region of the Union in which they arise.

Karima Delli, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, 2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, and it is in this context that we shall adopt, I hope, the report by Mr van Nistelrooij, which represents a major advance in the improvement of the living conditions of disadvantaged populations, insofar as it makes eligible for European aid, via the ERDF, projects for renovating and building housing and for combating energy poverty in all the Member States.

This proposal, which is supported by the Council of Europe, has long been awaited by all those who campaign for respect for the integration rights of marginalised communities, and particularly of the Roma.

On behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, I welcome the fact that the Union is investing heavily in the improvement of housing for the most disadvantaged communities, but we must not stop now that we are doing so well. We will be very vigilant with regard to the actual use of these funds, since they must not result in the exclusion of marginalised communities.

Indeed, there are numerous examples of urban renovation projects. They include the restoration of the city centre of Barcelona, and the work to regenerate the historic centres in the new Member States, which have done particularly well out of real estate speculation through the explosion in rent and rental charges. This, in turn, has led to the most disadvantaged families being driven away from the city centres.

These people absolutely must receive genuine social support and access to all public services, such as education, health care and public transport, but – as we proposed during the examination in committee – they must also receive resources sufficient to enable them to remain in these neighbourhoods, so that the latter do not become gentrified.

Parliament will have to evaluate the projects carried out before these funds are renewed in 2013 and will have to be involved in drafting the future regulation laying down the eligibility criteria, particularly in relation to transparency, so as to ensure that every single vulnerable population actually receives these funds and is afforded a dignified existence in the long term.

Oldřich Vlasák, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we know what ghettos and slums are like from our own experience. People living in these places earn the lowest pay and are often unemployed or dependent on social handouts. They are people who do not pay their rent, electricity bills or water rates on time. Rubbish is often found strewn around the streets and backyards in these districts. All of the buildings that are shared or not owned by anyone are falling into disrepair. We know from our own experience that socially marginalised groups live here. These may consist of just a few families or individuals living in one block of flats or they may occupy an entire neighbourhood with thousands of inhabitants. The location may be in the centre of a city or on the outskirts, or even somewhere completely outside built-up areas.

It is therefore good that the proposed change extends the scope of allocations from European funds to include the housing of marginalised groups and makes it possible for resources to be invested not only in cities, but also in the countryside, either by repairing the existing housing stock or by building new houses. I firmly believe, however, that mere physical investment in infrastructure will not solve the problems of ghettos. The fact that rubbish is cleared away, building facades are repaired, entrances renovated and buildings painted does not in itself mean that after a few years, a place will not look the same as it does today. Ghettos are not just a matter of environment or buildings but also of the people who live here. In future we should therefore

look for ways to combine this investment with on-site social work, to accompany it with employment support for people living in the ghettos and particularly to enable young people to break free from the social poverty trap. Only in this way will ghettos and slums become proper parts of our cities.

David Campbell Bannerman, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Mr President, Amendment 1 of this housing resolution proposes to extend use of the European Regional Development Fund to all Member States, not just those joining in 2004. So this is directly relevant to Britain.

It is clear from the resolution that the Roma population is the largest marginalised community in the report receiving support, plus others of similar socio-economic condition.

The overall budget for the European cohesion policy is a staggering EUR 347 billion over seven years – larger than many economies, even.

My constituents in East Anglia are already deeply concerned at the scale of the traveller and gypsy communities, particularly so in Essex. They will be angry should any of these measures facilitate yet more EU mass immigration.

Britain has already seen a rise in population of three and a half million – half the size of London – in the 12 years since the Labour Government came to power in 1997. Given, too, that nearly nine out of ten new British homes – 86% – will be due to immigration over the next 30 years, proposals like these seem to be yet another bridgehead for major immigration into Britain. We do not have the room. It is about space, not race.

Controlled immigration through permits and visas is a good thing, but uncontrolled immigration is a bad thing, for that is the fast route to extremism, which none of us desire.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, support for housing interventions for households with particularly difficult socio-economic circumstances is, in itself, a very good idea. The fact, too, that urban and rural areas are now to benefit equally from the support is very much to be welcomed. However, the support must by no means only be allocated to certain Member States and certain communities, thus clearly favouring those groups. That would be blatant discrimination against the other groups. However, that is precisely what this proposal does. It focuses, in particular, on the Roma people and also on legal migrants.

Furthermore, marginalisation must always be fought bilaterally – on the one hand, by the public authorities but, on the other, also by the groups affected, who should also play an active part in their own integration. Finally, we need to evaluate very carefully how worthwhile all of these measures are and we need to say a definite ‘no’ to preference on account of ethnic criteria.

Livia Járóka (PPE). – (HU) I would like to welcome the amendments to the European Regional Development Fund and to congratulate my fellow Member, Mr van Nistelrooij, on his report. The ERDF supports numerous programmes which could significantly improve and do improve the living conditions of the Roma, who are Europe's largest and most excluded minority, while not forgetting other groups who are in similar social and economic conditions.

It has long been an objective that arrangements regarding housing should no longer be limited only to cities, but should extend to the construction of new housing, and that these forms of support be made available to the old Member States as well, since this problem affects all of Europe. Regions which, compared to the regional average, are considerably underdeveloped and ghettoised hamper the development of all of Europe. A significant proportion of Roma live in disadvantaged areas throughout Europe, areas that are developed with the help of considerable support.

Immediate and joint action is needed. For this reason, we must carefully consider ring-fencing at European Union level some of the resources exclusively for bringing some of the LAU level I statistical units up to standard. It is very important to include an integrated approach in this regulation, ensuring that arrangements will take place in the context of a broader, more complex framework, taking into consideration perspectives such as education, economic activity and public service as well. What is needed, in keeping with the positions adopted by the European Parliament, is a complex Community action plan that spans parties and cycles and which, with the help of appropriate financial resources and legal force, is able to achieve substantial improvement on each of the Laeken indicators that reflect the true extent of social exclusion.

Monika Smolková (S&D). – (SK) The aim of regional policy is to eliminate economic and social differences. The EU has 27 Member States divided up into 271 regions. In every fourth region, per capita GDP is 75% lower than the average for the 27 EU countries. This is an alarming figure.

European regional policy brings added value through measures that are implemented directly in the field. It helps to finance specific projects to the benefit of regions, towns and villages and their inhabitants. A very positive step was taken last year when the OEP changed the rules on the European Fund for Regional Development so that all Member States could use it for reducing the energy consumption of buildings.

Today, we already have concrete positive results. In many towns, we have not only insulated buildings, but also the aesthetic value, the quality of life and the reduced cost of living are by no means negligible. I am a Member from Eastern Slovakia, from one of the regions that are far below the EU average. I therefore welcome the new draft regulation, which aims to extend the eligibility of housing to the benefit of marginalised groups.

In the 21st century, there are many groups of people living in demeaning conditions. Their social status makes it impossible for them to get better housing for themselves and their children. Local authorities will therefore be able gradually to integrate this group of inhabitants into the majority. I welcome this proposal and I support it, together with my fellow Members from Slovakia and the S&D grouping.

Trevor Colman (EFD). – Mr President, the problem which this report and its amendments on European regional development funding allegedly seeks to address is the one of the homeless or, as the report terms them, the marginalised communities. The EU solution is to throw millions of euros at renovating and building thousands of houses.

This report initially concerned itself with funding housing in Member States that had acceded to the EU on or after 1 May 2004. Now funds are to be disbursed to all Member States. According to the 2007 South-West Observatory Report for the south-western counties in England, the region's population has been increasing rapidly, entirely because of migration. Despite strong and growing public opposition to these developments, and the unsuitability of many proposed building sites, the EU house-building programme in Britain thunders on in complete disregard of democratic processes.

The South-West Leaders' Council has now assumed control of, and approval for, planning – a classic EU example of statutory powers being vested in a non-statutory body. The public mood in Britain is one of growing dismay. Unlimited, uncontrolled immigration is feeding public anger. Funding to support house building in Britain, and encouraging even greater numbers of immigrants to come to our shores, only exacerbates an already volatile situation.

Unless, as originally intended, this report addresses only those countries which joined the EU on or after 1 May 2004, the way of life in Britain, particularly in rural areas, will significantly change with a correspondingly violent resentment from the British people.

Iosif Matula (PPE). – (RO) I welcome the report which has been presented and congratulate Mr van Nistelrooij for the way in which he has handled and finalised it. I think that the ERDF regulation must be amended to allow states to use these finances to refurbish and build housing for marginalised communities. The objective of the actions taken by national and local authorities must be sustainable social inclusion of these communities, both in towns and rural areas.

I welcome the fact that the concentrated effort to support the Roma community must involve all European Union Member States. This is because the Roma population is the largest marginalised community in Europe, with a high level of cross-border mobility within Europe. However, we must take into consideration the needs of other communities too, especially those comprising legal immigrants, as well as communities of workers engaged in temporary employment in other EU states. For these reasons, it is a good idea to allow ERDF finances to be used for housing in all EU countries.

I believe in the success of this programme and I hope that we will continue by launching a new phase in supporting families from marginalised communities by providing suitable facilities and helping them find and hold down jobs, particularly during the current crisis. I support this report which will also allow Romania to access funds for facilitating the social inclusion of marginalised people, including Roma, in both urban and rural areas.

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D). – (PT) The aim of this report on the ERDF is to broaden eligibility for intervention in the housing sector in favour of the marginalised communities of our Member States. Until now, this support only applied to marginalised communities living in urban areas in the new Member States. In other

words, given that the great majority of communities of this type live in rural areas and in shelters, such communities could not benefit from this support to replace poor quality housing.

Ultimately, it is a question of filling a gap and giving the Member States and their regions greater opportunities in terms of the policy to mitigate the specific difficulties of these communities.

I also welcome its equal treatment for all Member States, because marginalised communities with a need for assistance and integration deserve our concern, regardless of the Member State to which they belong.

If this important report in the fight against poverty and for human dignity is concluded at first reading, it will also be possible to implement it quickly within the economic recovery plan, thus responding swiftly to the crisis which is affecting us.

Sophie Briard Auconie (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, European cohesion policy was created in order to provide real answers, with the help of sizeable financial resources, to the questions posed by other European policies. It was intended, in particular, to help the most fragile Member States cope with competition within the internal market.

Today, its main task is to find solutions to the challenges presented by the opening-up of borders and the free movement of persons, which are a very good thing but which may create temporary difficulties. The issue of the living conditions of the Roma is linked to that of the opening-up of borders. This is an eminently European issue. Therefore, it is only right that all the Member States should be able to use the European Regional Development Fund, the ERDF, to build housing for the Roma and thus ensure true solidarity among Europeans.

I have requested, via several amendments tabled in the Committee on Regional Development, that this measure be extended to all the Member States of the European Union. I am delighted that this idea has been taken up and I give my full support to this amended text.

In my view, this increased eligibility of housing for expenses cofinanced by the ERDF must lead us to consider other possible developments, in the medium and long terms, whether it be in terms of funding eligibility or of the earmarking of funds for certain strategic priorities.

Kinga Góncz (S&D). – (HU) I, too, am pleased to welcome the amendment to the ERDF regulation and believe that this is now a concrete tool that can be of significant help in finding truly Europe-wide solutions to improving the situation of Roma communities, even if this tool does not serve Roma communities exclusively, but other marginalised communities as well.

To those colleagues who were speaking of immigration, I would like to say that, after all, if differences decrease, if living conditions improve, this works to counter immigration, and I think that we can expect that to be the result here as well.

I would like to enumerate a few perspectives that must in any event be taken into consideration in the regulation and its implementation. It is very important that these resources should be available not only in an urban but also in a rural environment, in order that they may be used to increase housing supply by renovating as well as building new houses, that the reduction of segregation should be an important goal, and that the approach be an integrated one; thus, it should go hand in hand with educational and occupational programmes, in a way that represents a sustainable, lasting solution. Let me add that an important priority of the Trio Presidency is the improvement of the situation of the Roma. The Spanish Presidency is taking significant steps in this direction, and the Hungarian Presidency will continue to do so as well.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, firstly I would like to compliment my colleague, Mr van Nistelrooij, for his industry and leadership in this very important area.

Owning a house is something I think many people aspire to, and it reminds me of the first lines of a poem I learnt from an Irish poet a long time ago. It went, 'Oh, to have a little house! To own the hearth, the stool and all! | The dresser filled with shining delph, | The pile of turf against the wall!'.

And I think what we are doing here today is helping to bring that dream into reality for many people across the European Union, but specifically the Roma community.

It has been pointed out and, having discussed it, we suggest that it should be expanded to other marginalised groups. In particular, I had in mind my own area of Limerick where, in places like Myross and Southill, they

have suffered hugely due to drug-pushing and violence associated with it. There is now a need for a major regeneration to alleviate these terrible situations.

Under these proposals, that can be done, and also it will be very important in kick-starting the building industry, which has suffered hugely right across the European Union as a result of the economic downturn.

So, we are moving at the right time and it can benefit the most marginalised so that they can all look forward to having a house, a hearth, a stool and the shining delph.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) The eligibility of housing interventions financed by the ERDF in favour of marginalised communities will help Member States improve the absorption of European funds. My personal view is that this eligibility must be applied to all Member States.

Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 was modified recently to allow all Member States to improve energy efficiency in homes. The new text stipulates a rate of 4%. For the sake of textual consistency and reducing bureaucracy, it would have perhaps been a good idea for us to retain the same percentage.

The new provisions stipulate the need to promote some urban development projects for areas threatened by physical deterioration or social exclusion, as well as for marginalised communities. This also includes those areas affected by disasters such as flooding or earthquakes. I would like to conclude, Mr President, by urging the Commission to join forces with Member States and use 2010 to review the operational programmes in order to increase the absorption of European funds with a view to improving the social housing stock.

Jan Březina (PPE). – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a well known fact that the consequences of the current economic crisis fall hardest on socially vulnerable groups of citizens. I therefore welcome the fact that the EU is looking for ways to help these people. While it is already possible for the European Fund for Regional Development to intervene in order to assist marginalised groups living in cities, rural areas have hitherto been virtually excluded from this type of intervention and must make do with payments from the financially weaker Fund for Rural Development. I firmly believe that this financial imbalance must be corrected. It is important for recognised expenditure not to be limited to replacing existing buildings with new ones, but also to include the renovation of existing residential buildings. This would dramatically expand the range of possible interventions and increase the effectiveness of the measures.

In the new Member States in particular, the housing situation for these groups is often critical and solutions require immediate and decisive intervention by public bodies. A broad opportunity is opening up for the EU Structural Funds to supplement in an effective way national resources that are, in themselves, insufficient to bring about a fundamental improvement in the situation.

I fully agree with the specific reference to the Roma population as the largest socially marginalised group and, at the same time, I endorse the view that interventions targeting the Roma should not exclude other people who find themselves in similar social and economic circumstances.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) People throughout the European Union have problems renovating their homes, but the situation is particularly complicated in the new European Union Member States. The new Member States are united by a common trait – they all inherited inefficient apartment blocks, which are very expensive to maintain, and processes of renovation are either taking place very slowly or not at all. It is very important that the application of this regulation is not exclusively limited to large, socially isolated communities, but that its provisions can also be applied to the most socially vulnerable groups, like the disabled, the poor, needy young families, immigrants and others, who also suffer from social isolation and do not have opportunities to renovate their homes. I am convinced that, by taking advantage of assistance from the Structural Funds, this document will give every region of the European Union the opportunity to invest in social infrastructure, ensuring access to housing, and this, in turn, will not only help reduce social isolation, but will contribute to the creation of a stable social, economic and environmental protection policy in the whole Community.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the proposal of the European Commission concerning the Regulation on the European Regional Development Fund assumes that initiatives in the area of housing can be put into effect exclusively in urban areas and in the form of the renovation of existing housing. The provisions do not cover rural areas, which means that many people from marginalised social groups living in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will not benefit from the proposed solutions. This stems from the fact that in the new Member States, the poorest groups, which suffer social exclusion because of their low material status, live mainly in rural areas.

In my opinion, the introduction of amendments will be a beneficial addition to the regulation, which will also allow protection to be given to communities living outwith urban areas, which will give significant support to the work of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Change of this type will make it possible to improve the material status of the poorest communities, in which people are disadvantaged because of the place where they live. This stems from the fact that in the new Member States, the difference in standard of living between rural and urban areas is much greater than in Western Europe. In this part of Europe, unfortunately, material status is still a visible barrier to access to education, employment and participation in cultural life. Ensuring better housing conditions to groups of people who suffer the greatest social exclusion will open the way for them to improve their social status and will encourage them to develop themselves. Local governments and non-governmental organisations should join the efforts to help in the area of tackling social exclusion.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, allow me to begin by highlighting the role of the rapporteur, Mr van Nistelrooij, for his work in search of consensus in this matter and also for the willingness that he always demonstrated to include other contributions in his report.

Tomorrow, we shall vote upon amendments to the ERDF Regulation which are of particular importance for the so-called old Member States and also for Portugal. These changes will expand the use of the ERDF in the housing sector in favour of marginalised communities since, at the moment, this fund can only be used for urban development operations.

The amendments that I and my fellow Members proposed, and which were approved by a large majority in the Committee on Regional Development, will allow the old Member States, and not only the new ones, as the original draft proposed, to be able to benefit as well from this possibility of financing.

In doing so, I tried to avoid creating a precedent, which I consider to be dangerous, and which would exclude all the old Member States from this and, in all probability, from additional uses of Union aid. That would not make any sense, given that housing problems, especially those of marginalised communities, exist in both the new and the old Member States.

I welcome the opportunity to reiterate that the length of membership of the European Union must not be a criterion in the attribution of structural funds and that this criterion must be immediately abandoned.

The negotiation of the post-2013 cohesion policy must be based on solidarity, aiming at territorial cohesion, and it must be directed in a way that rewards, rather than punishes, the regions which have shown themselves to be exemplary in their use of community aid.

Artur Zasada (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, in the context of today's discussion, I would like to draw attention to the controversial proposal to amend Article 47 of the Commission Regulation of 2006. This article states that areas selected for housing operations shall comply with at least three of the criteria listed in the article. However, the new regulation proposes qualification on the basis of only one of the criteria, which means that, in practice, areas which are not entitled will be able to apply for funds by adjusting their situation to the legal requirements. I would like to point out, for example, that the criterion of 'a low level of economic activity' is very easy to achieve in new housing estates built in rural areas. Then, instead of going to the most needy, help with housing will go to developers and affluent residents of new estates.

Frédéric Daerden (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that housing is a difficult issue to deal with at European level because it is not really part of the European Union's remit. However, it is widely accepted that the development of quality housing is necessary to ensure social cohesion and to help ensure the success of the Commission's recovery plan.

I am therefore delighted that the financing of investments in the housing sector, and particularly in the area of energy efficiency, is increasingly being covered by the Structural Funds, but we must go further. Therefore, going beyond this proposal, we should pay particular attention to the homeless, of whom there are an estimated three million in Europe.

That is why this point is one of the priorities of the Belgian Presidency, which will assume office in the second half of 2010. I hope that it will lead to this subject being put on the European agenda, so that we can undertake yet more formal work on it. This work will involve, among other things, introducing precise methods of recording the number of homeless people in order to achieve a global awareness of this phenomenon, and increasing the support for social housing.

Diane Dodds (NI). – Mr President, I know that this report is specifically in relation to Roma families and other specific groups.

I want to stress that all people deserve and need social housing that is fit for purpose. However, this Parliament should not forget that there are many people in ordinary communities, either in the inner cities or in rural areas, who live in very poor housing and who find it impossible to access decent housing. These people need to know that this Parliament recognises their need. They are just as marginalised, whether it is through poverty, drugs or crime.

One issue that is causing concern to providers of social housing in Northern Ireland is the rules around public procurement. And, while they are intended to promote fair competition across the European Union, they are having unintended negative effects on the development of badly needed social housing in marginalised communities, mainly because of the difficulty of obtaining land in what was, until recently, a speculators' market.

Northern Ireland has been seriously affected by this and last year, the problem meant that replacements had to be found in the social housing programme for 500 out of 1 500 houses that were planned.

These are issues that we need to address as well. I would encourage this House to look at this as part of the problem of housing in marginalised communities.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) The new regulations on housing eligibility provide an example of the way in which the same funds can be used to a greater effect, without being topped up.

The first step was taken last year when the rules for using European funds to improve energy efficiency were relaxed. On this point, I just want to say that it was a small step and the percentage allowed could be re-examined. The second step is the one being taken today.

In both instances, it involved adapting texts which date, in some cases, from very different times to the current period we are going through. This is why I wonder whether other aspects of the use of European funds should not perhaps be re-examined as well in order to amend those criteria which no longer meet current needs.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) 2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Unfortunately, there are a huge number of people facing dire poverty and marginalisation, contrary to the European Union's fundamental principles and values. The vulnerability of these communities has tangibly increased during the current period of economic crisis. Against this background, I welcome the initiative to extend the eligibility conditions within the European Regional Development Fund, which is an important and vital instrument in the fight against poverty.

Due to the poor quality of housing conditions, I feel it is necessary to speed up the granting of financial assistance. Financial support must be offered for housing in both urban and rural areas. In addition, no differentiation must be made between the Roma population and other social groups in similar situations when this financial support is allocated.

Paweł Samecki, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, firstly, I would like to thank the rapporteur for his work. I much appreciate it. Secondly, two comments on the substance of the debate. I heard some concerns about the potential side effects in the form of additional immigration. In fact, this proposal is not about incentives to immigration; it is about how to deal with the current state. I think it should be perceived, as Mrs Göncz mentioned, as a disincentive to immigration.

The second comment on the substance. The Commission will, of course, look forward to the revision of operational programmes: this will depend on the initiative of national and regional authorities but we will look very warmly at such changes.

Finally, let me welcome this debate which sets out Parliament's commitment to the inclusion of marginalised communities. It is a further step in support of an open and inclusive Europe 2020. I think we will count on the national and regional authorities to make good use of these new facilities.

Lambert van Nistelrooij, rapporteur. – (NL) I am uncommonly satisfied about the support and the creativity, but at this moment, I nevertheless want to emphasise that we are not there yet; we may be adopting the frameworks, but the criteria must then be defined and that is still extraordinarily exciting, because you can do everything with money, even the wrong things, which I still have a few concerns about. This is something I will doubtless remind the new Commissioner about, as well as the Council.

A second point is that it is, in a manner of speaking, a voluntary framework. This framework is now being offered to the Member States in legislation. There is no certainty that it will subsequently be given priority. In this context, I call for active information from the European Commission, because this concerns a choice in principle. Today, we have been told 'You are choosing for Europe'; for this new Commission with a social face, it is important that we are actively involved in the implementation. The social groupings in question must also be involved in the implementation, because we will then arrive at a better product and a more sustainable result.

I would like to thank everyone one more time and I hope for a positive result tomorrow. We are keeping an eye on the ball and will follow the situation on the ground.

Finally, the fact that we are the first legislative dossier under the new treaty is mainly due to the priority we have set.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday at 12 noon.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Ádám Kósa (PPE), *in writing*. – I strongly believe the Commission was right to propose amendment of Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 on the European Regional Development Fund as regards the eligibility of housing interventions in favour of marginalised communities. Furthermore, I think that the Council also realised the importance of the proposal in terms of underlining the need for a new integrated point of view. In Central Europe, and especially in Hungary, there are many seriously disabled persons who are living in old, dilapidated buildings. A lot of places had served as castles or mansions before the Second World War, but Communism forgot them, along with the abandoned people they placed in them. I know that a lot of disadvantaged groups have special circumstances and problems, and I feel strongly that we must take the consequences of financial and economic crisis into account. We should support such amendments – in accordance with the views of civil stakeholders – that allow for much better integrated projects involving the building industry, tourism, the labour market, rural development and social integration at the same time. We cannot let European taxpayers' money be spent on dead ends. We must focus on the real solutions.

14. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

15. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was suspended at 20.10)