

WEDNESDAY, 9 MAY 2012

IN THE CHAIR: MARTIN SCHULZ

President

(The sitting opened at 15.00)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Friday, 20 April 2012.

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

3. Welcome

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to welcome members and high-ranking officials of the National Constituent Assembly of the Republic of Tunisia, who are seated in the VIP gallery. We extend a warm welcome to you, ladies and gentlemen.

(Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Constituent Assembly of Tunisia, welcome to the European Parliament. You represent great hope for your country and for Europe. Welcome to the European Parliament.

(Applause)

I would like to welcome a delegation from the European School of Uccle to the visitors' gallery. These students have put a great deal of work into their involvement in a school project in Zambia. We extend a warm welcome to you, ladies and gentlemen and students of the school. Welcome to the European Parliament.

4. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

5. Verification of credentials: see Minutes

6. Interpretation of the Rules of Procedure: see Minutes

7. Corrigendum (Rule 216): see Minutes

8. Documents received: see Minutes

9. Written declarations (submission): see Minutes

10. Lapsed written declarations: see Minutes

11. Texts of agreements forwarded by the Council: see Minutes

12. Action taken on Parliament's resolutions: see Minutes

13. Order of business: see Minutes

14. Statements by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, we note with grave concern the recent developments in Bahrain. Rather than instigating reforms and opening up the country as had been announced, in recent days, pressure on human rights activists has been stepped up.

On behalf of the European Parliament, I would like to remind the Kingdom of its duty to respect human rights. Bahrain has ratified international human rights conventions that are legally and morally binding.

We call for an immediate national dialogue with the representatives of all the political forces in the country, as advocated by Professor Bassiouni and the Commission of Inquiry.

The situation in Egypt also remains very tense. It is unacceptable that more than a year after the fall of the Mubarak dictatorship, human rights activists, journalists, bloggers and writers continue to suffer harassment and intimidation. The ongoing legal proceedings against our Sakharov Prize winner, Asmaa Mahfouz, are just one example of many. We in this Parliament will always be on the side of those who struggle to achieve an open, pluralistic and tolerant society – whether in our neighbouring countries or in other regions of the world.

In addition, I have also been asked to make express mention in this context of the case of Dr Wenceslao Mansogo in Equatorial Guinea.

15. Tribute

President. – Today, we are mourning a valued Member of this House, our fellow Member, Miguel de Sacadura Cabral Portas, who died on 24 April at the age of just 53.

Miguel Portas graduated in economics and followed his vocation into journalism. He pursued this profession for many years with great commitment and, as we are all aware, with great passion. Miguel was first elected to the European Parliament in 2004.

At the age of 15, Miguel was arrested by the secret police of the Salazar regime for participating in a student demonstration. He took part in the Carnation Revolution, which eventually led to the fall of Portugal's dictatorship. He was a lifelong, passionate left-wing activist and an ardent defender of democracy.

I came to know Miguel Portas as a staunch European who fought with all his heart for social justice and democracy. Although – like many others – I did not always share his convictions, we were all able to experience his constructive, positive and human contributions to debates, even where the subject matter was controversial. He was a man who spoke his opinion openly, a genuinely fair person to work with who never hid behind procedural issues in any way, but rather was always willing to seek out decisions by democratic majority and, in the end, to accept it if things did not go his way. He was a man of his word.

I think his sense of humour will not be forgotten by any of us in this House. Miguel was also one of our Members who was able to laugh at himself, and his laugh will be an abiding memory for us all.

At this difficult time, our thoughts go out to his family and friends, who are holding a memorial service for him here tomorrow, to which you are warmly invited. We have undoubtedly lost an outstanding Member of our House to a cruel disease which he fought against bravely, but which, in the end, defeated him. We have lost a great Member of this House.

May I now ask you to rise from your seats as a mark of respect.

(The House rose and observed a minute's silence)

16. Future of Europe (debate)

President. – The next item is the statement by the President on the future of Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen of the House and visitors in the galleries:

Just over 60 years ago, a quiet revolution began which was to change our world. From the rubble of the Second World War, the foundation stone was laid for a project that has achieved something unique in human history. Enemies reached out their hands in reconciliation and became friends; a region racked by hunger developed into the most prosperous single market in the world; people cast off dictatorships and transformed their countries into democracies. We built up the most advanced social model and the best health care provision in the world.

Together, we created a European social model that allows us to live together a little bit better every day; a model that combines democracy with peace, freedom and solidarity in a way that is unique in the world.

We should be proud of what we have achieved – and we should defend it, conscious of where we have come from.

More than 60 years ago, men and women who had themselves lived through two devastating world wars swore that it should never happen again. The pictures of bloody battlefields had not yet faded and the destroyed houses had yet to be rebuilt when these men and women came up with an astounding idea – one which, in view of the circumstances in which they were living, was almost surreal. To prevent a disaster on the scale of the Second World War from ever happening again, they proposed a quiet revolution: not to build walls, but rather to tear down what separates people; not to trample down their arch enemy for all time, but rather to put out a hand and help him to his feet; not to condemn the perpetrators forever, but to integrate them into the community and forgive them; not to close off borders, but to open up barriers; not to indulge in protectionism of their own national economies, but rather to closely interweave national economies; not to strike out on their own path into the future, but to take the road together, for the good of everyone. That was the aim of these men and women.

The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community created ‘a *de facto* solidarity’, as its founding father Robert Schuman described it 62 years ago to the day. This *de facto* solidarity was based on the realisation that if we want to survive – in the truest sense of the word – then we absolutely have to live together and act jointly. The realisation that our interests can no longer be separated from those of our neighbours, the realisation that alone we are weak, but together we are strong – this realisation created a model that is unique in human history: a model that has given us six decades of peace, freedom, democracy, equality, prosperity and solidarity.

The courage of these founding fathers and mothers to find an answer out of their experience of the nadir of civilisation to which Europe had sunk, the courage to come up with an answer which said that we can only do it if we work together, so therefore we have to go about it in a united way. It should be far easier for us, with the institutional structure of the European Union and decades of successful history behind us, to work up the courage to recognise that we must act together as we tackle economic decline and growing unemployment than it was for our fathers and mothers, our grandfathers and grandmothers, to whom this acknowledgement did not come easily.

Ladies and gentlemen, our forefathers built a Europe, yet lived among rubble; our forefathers built a Europe even though, in some cases, they were living in hunger; our forefathers built a Europe despite being war invalids, or widows, or having spent a decade in captivity, or having been victims of terror and torture. Yet they had the courage to say: 'We will do it together' – even though they had such a brutal history behind them.

Why, then, does retreating into national positions seem more appealing to us than our collective present? Why are the centrifugal forces of the current crisis driving us apart, instead of binding us closer together?

Today, two of the greatest achievements of European integration are again being questioned: the euro and freedom of movement. What could symbolise Europe more than the freedom to work, live and travel without borders? The Erasmus generation takes this right for granted and sees it as an everyday part of life to be able to move around in an area without barriers and passport controls. Do we want to let this be taken away from us? Anyone who lays a hand on the Schengen Area is undermining the very foundations of the European Union.

(Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, let us not retreat to behind national borders. Let us instead act together with solidarity to improve protection at the external borders of the EU and protection of the common governance of the Schengen Area at EU level – that is what we need to do to resolve the problems that we undoubtedly face.

I would like to say something about the euro. The euro was supposed to bring the peoples of Europe together; now it threatens to become a symbol of national egotism on all sides, and even threatens to become symbolic of division. Returning to individual national currencies would be fatal, and the political and economic losses would be dramatic. Do we all want to go back to paying in German marks, in Dutch guilders, in French francs, in Belgian francs, in Luxembourg francs, in Italian lira, in Spanish pesetas? Is it not obvious to everyone in this House that no individual currency could survive in the intercontinental competition between currencies? Instead of being a global player with a world reserve currency, we would then fall back into parochialism – accompanied by a loss of political and economic significance for which the people of the European Union would foot the bill.

Only together, ladies and gentlemen, can we move forward. In this House, we have long been calling for budgetary discipline. However, this House has also long been calling for a growth pact. This is because we know that, were they to go it alone, the individual countries would be sucked down into the vortex of the global financial markets. Only together can we oppose Europe's economic decline and our growing levels of unemployment.

In the European Parliament, we have long been calling for balanced budgets. Indeed, they are essential. I should like to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that it is my deep personal conviction that balanced budgets are also necessary for intergenerational justice. Speaking for myself, I cannot accept my standard of living being financed in such a way that my children and my children's children will have to foot the bill for my current standard of living. That is not right.

(Applause)

That is why we need budgetary discipline; that much is beyond dispute. However, this Parliament also says that alongside austerity we need initiatives to stimulate growth. We have long been calling for a financial transaction tax as a new source of income, and this proposal has the support of a majority that extends across the political groups of this House in a way unequalled by almost any other past project. We want to curb tax evasion. Let me add, ladies and gentlemen, that in situations of crisis such as that in which we currently find ourselves, the true patriots are those who help their countries – not those who take capital out of the countries and refuse to show solidarity.

If we are to take the idea of a European growth initiative seriously – and the Heads of Government are indeed taking it seriously, for we know that a special summit is to be held on 23 May – then we must also make clear how this growth initiative is to work. Indeed, we will also have to say what funding will have to be made available for it.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is why we need the European Parliament to make a clear declaration on the EU budget on this Schuman Day. Cutting the EU budget arbitrarily in a populist manner makes good press, but it is not sensible.

(Applause)

The EU budget is an investment budget that is used to leverage economic growth and create jobs. Anyone wielding the shears is robbing us of our common future.

No one needs a growth pact more than the young people of this continent, for there is a risk of Europe's youth becoming the victims of the financial crisis and becoming a lost generation. The young people aged from 18 to 30 that I met in Spain last week – all of them graduates, some with three degrees, all of them unemployed – these young people are not responsible for the crisis, but they are paying a disproportionately high price for the rescue of countries and banks. A young man and woman in Madrid said to me that they could accept us spending EUR 750 billion to stabilise our financial system, but when would we have a million for them? Already one in four Europeans below the age of 25 is unemployed; in some countries, the figure is even one in two.

Investments in further education and improved training opportunities represent money well invested. That is what Robert Schuman meant by *de facto* solidarity. If the EU can save Europe from sliding into recession by acting proactively, if we can save jobs by doing so and even create new ones – well, that is *de facto* solidarity.

Europe is strong when it is united and shows solidarity. We need to understand that if we are to save Europe from insignificance. We want to strengthen European democracy. We want greater transparency in decision-making processes and we want to be able to choose between clear political alternatives. By the way, that is what the people expect of us. We want to declare our solidarity and obstruct national egotism. Equalisation between rich and poor, between large and small Member States has always been for the good of all.

We want to remind ourselves that we are a community of values. Our values are at the core of our identity. As Europeans, we should embrace our responsibility for the world – and we want to do so. A year after the Arab Spring began, we want to be partners to our neighbours in their process of transformation.

I constantly hear it said that the people will not go along with making things more European. I do not believe that. The lively interest shown in the elections in France and Greece last weekend – precisely because of the debate on Europe – shows that what happens in Europe is seen as European domestic politics. It shows how much people are aware that we all depend on each other, that failures in one country cause problems for all the other countries. It shows that people know that solutions can only be found together.

Even in the current situation, the European Union is the most successful political and social experiment in history. From the beginnings of the unification process in the Schuman Plan of 1950, through the laying of the foundations for the Common Market with the Treaty of Rome in 1958, through to today's community of 27 nations – soon to be 28 – with a population of 500 million people, the development of the European project has been breathtaking. Portugal, Spain and Greece shook off their dictatorships. We have just bid farewell to one of our Members who was an active participant in this liberation. Two decades ago, the Berlin Wall fell and the Soviet Union disintegrated, opening up the way for Europe's unification. Our expansion to the east ended the artificial division of our continent by the Iron Curtain once and for all. The prospect of accession to the European Union supported the peaceful transformation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, thereby contributing to the security, stability and prosperity of the whole of Europe.

Many of those countries' citizens expected accession to the EU to change the new Member States. Few foresaw how profoundly the new Member States would change the EU – would change *us* – for the better. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe brought with them their own political and historical experience, which has enriched the European perspective enormously. I am therefore proud – and I say this on Europe Day with the greatest respect – to have succeeded my Polish predecessor, Jerzy Buzek, as President of Parliament. The fact that I succeeded you, Mr Buzek, showed that today we are one continent that is strong together because we want to be strong together.

In Europe, we share common values: democracy, freedom, solidarity and human rights. We must never forget those who dedicated their lives to the fight against oppression and the fight for freedom and democracy. The Iron Curtain and the dictatorships in Southern Europe did not fall easily; they were brought down by the peaceful protest of people – and in Eastern Europe, particularly by the peaceful protest of citizens – against a criminal system that was oppressing Eastern Europe. Some of our Members were among those who took part in that. On this date, we are greatly indebted to them. Still today, they are role models for those fighting for freedom throughout the world – most recently in the Arab Spring, when the revolutionaries in Africa were reminiscent of the uprising against these dictatorships in Europe. It is astonishing that they remember the revolutionaries of Europe, yet the example of the revolutionaries has become so unappreciated by Europeans.

(Applause)

Sixty years ago, a quiet revolution began that changed our world for ever. Europe has shown that it can be done: democracy, justice, freedom and solidarity can be combined. Bringing together justice and democracy, freedom and solidarity across the borders of countries and peoples – that is our European model of society. A model in which there is

a free press and independent courts; a model which guarantees provision for the sick and elderly, and that arranges free access to education and opportunities for advancement to everyone; a model of parliamentary democracy and of democratic and political participation; a model of equal rights and of indivisible citizens' rights that are enshrined in law; a model that constantly strives to achieve the highest social and environmental standards, and that now has the highest environmental standards in the world; a system in which there is no child labour and no death penalty.

We have created a society that puts people at the centre. That is the society in which I want to live, and I believe you do, too. I want my children and my children's children to be able to live in such a society as well.

However, there is no guarantee that the type of society in which we live today will last forever. We need Europe in order to defend our democratic and social model, particularly in times of globalisation. We must not take what we have achieved for granted; we have to fight for it anew every day.

Today, on Europe Day, ladies and gentlemen, we want to remember where we have come from and what we have achieved. Not in order to heap praise on ourselves, but because our history serves as a reminder to us to defend what we have achieved. What we have achieved is something that provides a firm foundation for a democratic, free, fair and stable future for our children.

(Loud applause)

Joseph Daul, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today we are celebrating Europe. This celebration on 9 May is particularly significant at a delicate time for European integration in economic terms, but also in political terms. We often forget the progress our countries have made since signing Robert Schuman's declaration, yet never in our history have we known such an area of peace and prosperity in spite of the current crisis. We Europeans have paid a high price to understand that there is no difference between our neighbours and ourselves. We know at last the value of tolerance, of dialogue, of solidarity, which take precedence over individualism.

Ladies and gentlemen, the rise of extremism and the lure of populism require our attention. Left-wing populism has no more place in Europe than right-wing populism. I urge all the mainstream political parties to remember that they have nothing to gain and everything to lose if extremism becomes commonplace. Intellectual shortcuts and easy solutions are mere demagoguery. They simply entertain the false hopes of our citizens, which quickly come to nothing.

How, then, in this context, can we reduce Europe's democratic deficit? As I said, Europe is experiencing a difficult period and the decisions that will be made over the coming months will determine the stability of our economies and the social cohesion of our countries. The debt crisis and the recent attacks on the markets against our currency have at least had the merit of making us aware of the deterioration of public finances that has been going on in several European countries for decades. We have shown, in Parliament, with the 'six-pack', with the fiscal treaty, and soon with the 'two-pack' as well, that Europe has demonstrated the courage to take itself to task and reverse this trend.

However, our efforts have only just begun and we must under no circumstances relax them.

I must say, what worries me most is this current political debate between growth and cleaning up national finances. Indeed, behind the caricatures, it is not that there are those in Europe who are in favour of good management and those who are in favour of growth, simply because they are two sides of the same coin, as I have often said here in this Chamber.

The reality is that we cannot separate deficit reduction and growth, and you have said so yourself. There will be no sustainable growth unless we reduce our debts and this reduction will come about all the more quickly with strong growth. The reality is that growth-stimulating measures cannot be synonymous with additional spending. We no longer have the resources. The reality is that, as long as the most spendthrift countries refuse to lead debt-reduction policies, the countries that are themselves making an effort towards sound management will no longer be able to show solidarity.

Ladies and gentlemen, confidence is what will come from investment and growth. I am not talking about artificial growth. There is only one way to achieve this: enhancing the competitiveness of our economies in the context of globalisation.

Europe has a promising future so long as we all assume our responsibilities and we implement the decisions that have already been adopted. We know very well what is needed: completing the single market, investing in research and development to continue to play the leading role among 21st century economies, and reducing administrative burdens to unlock the potential of our SMEs and our companies. It is in this way, and by cleaning up our public finances, that we will ensure growth and that we will create jobs for the future.

Robert Schuman's declaration paved a new way for Europeans. Now more than ever, we are bound together. We are united, responsible for one another, and this involves budgetary convergence, which is under way, but also fiscal and social convergence. Yet this solidarity can only work if each of us makes efforts and is ready to combine cleaning up public finances with sustainable growth.

You know that Robert Schuman's declaration brought us a project for peace, which has been a success. Let us say it too. However, I should like to finish with these words: solidarity, responsibility, enthusiasm, conviction and let us have a project for the future, for growth and for employment.

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, you mentioned Europe's changes, its challenges, but also its successes.

There are also disappointments, however. The recent results of the elections in Greece were undoubtedly a bitter disappointment for us. The people of Greece are also disappointed in Europe, however. They are in despair. The elections were an expression of hopelessness and of opposition to social injustice. Europe failed to understand that as well as calling for the necessary reforms, it also needed to light a beacon of hope.

Yet there is hope:

(FR) There are already good signs of change. The French people have elected a President who represents social justice and European values. I should also like today to congratulate François Hollande on his election. I, too, think that 'change is now!'

(Applause)

(DE) As Martin Wolf – no social democrat – wrote today in the *Financial Times*:

Hollande 'alone of European leaders has the desire and the ability to try' to bring Europe out of the crisis.

(DE) We have to do so. Europe will only be a success if we are able to overcome this crisis. So that everyone understands this correctly, particularly those on the right – in Germany, for example – I will say that German is not the only language being spoken in Europe right now; people are also speaking French and, above all, they are speaking the language of social democracy – and not just in France, but in Romania and other countries too.

Ladies and gentlemen, Europe Day was originally supposed to make us remember the destruction of our continent by major wars and the reconstruction that was necessary. Millions of people had to die before we set about creating peace between the countries of Europe. This peace project remains inspirational even today. However, Europe has to offer more than just peace between its peoples. Particularly given the crises, we also have to defend and fortify the social peace that is currently in jeopardy. An austerity policy that mainly affects the weakest in society threatens this social peace, engenders resistance and unrest, and, as a result, the people of Europe feel insecure and do not feel confident that they are in good hands. The consequence is often support for extremist and frequently anti-European parties.

Thus, Europe once again faces the risk of political destruction. However, we Social Democrats, and I believe many of us, do not want a war between generations, or a war between nationals and migrants, or a war between social partners. On the contrary, we want social peace in Europe to be safeguarded and restored.

My group – and I have repeatedly made this clear – is not opposed to a policy of budgetary consolidation. What we are currently seeing in Europe, however, is an economy drive that often has the opposite effect. Key investments have been and are being neglected. The level of public investment has therefore fallen dramatically in recent years. What do the Heads of Government – and unfortunately also often the Commission – concern themselves with instead? With further budget cuts, instead of growth and investment. This policy only leads to even greater deficits.

Slowly, people are beginning to rethink. For us, however – and I will say this quite openly and honestly – it is far too tentative. We do not need lip service or sops; what we need is greater scope for public investment. We also need a new truly golden rule; that is, a rule for growth and employment that combines budgetary discipline with investments to generate growth and employment. We do not need a golden rule which, in reality, is nothing more than a stolid austerity policy and which makes false promises regarding growth and employment.

Above all – as you also mentioned, Mr President – we need jobs for young people. How can we expect young people to be enthusiastic about Europe if, at the same time, we are producing and tolerating mass unemployment in Europe? That is why the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament is calling for an employment and training guarantee for young people. Young people in Europe need to have jobs again. Only then will they be enthusiastic about Europe.

(Applause)

However, social Europe must include everyone who lives and works in Europe – including those who have come here from elsewhere. In particular, we need to address those who were actually born in Europe but are still considered foreigners or outsiders. Integration

does not just mean integration between different countries; it also means integrating all our fellow citizens into daily life and into political decision-making processes. A crisis that threatens our social peace does not need barriers and exclusion, but rather openness and inclusion. In contrast to Geert Wilders, Marine Le Pen and the neo-fascist Chrysi Avgi party in Greece, we want to say clearly to these, our fellow residents, that the European Union is their home too, and that they, too, should feel at home here in Europe.

(Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, today, our group invited some young visitors to join us in debating the future of Europe, and one person taking part expressed the opinion that the crisis was not a punishment from God, but was instead of our own making. That is why we must come out of the crisis together. This Parliament should recognise the signs of the times. We have many differences when it comes to details, but we need to fight the destructive forces in Europe together. Together, we must ensure that social peace can be restored in Europe. My group is prepared to defend and strengthen Europe. I hope that many will join us; that this Europe – of which you have spoken so positively, Mr President – is also our common Europe. For all of us.

Guy Verhofstadt, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, allow me, like Mr Swoboda, to also paraphrase the new President elected in France. He won the elections by saying: ‘Change is now!’. Personally, I would rather say: ‘Europe is change’.

We need Europe now, on this 9 May. Taking into account, Mr President, the seriousness of the crisis in which we find ourselves today – we must recognise it because it is all very well to say so many positive things about the past but we must recognise the seriousness of the current situation – I will say: Europe is becoming marginalised in the world. Europe is facing a trend decline in its growth and innovation, in stark contrast to an incredible catching up on the part of emerging countries.

Europe’s population is currently ageing in a world that is getting considerably younger, a world that will soon be home to 10 billion inhabitants. Europe itself remains segregated, divided by its nation states in a world that is becoming more and more dominated and unified by large economic and political empires.

Ladies and gentlemen, contrary to what some may say, this crisis that we are experiencing today in Europe is not a crisis of the global economy; it is not even a crisis of global finance. What we are experiencing today is, in fact, a European crisis and, more specifically, a crisis of European states.

For several years, Europe – we must recognise it on this 9 May – has been at sea with no horizon, no ambition, no hope, apparently incapable, for the time being, of finding a new path and sustainable solutions. I think that on this 9 May, rather than congratulating one another, we must recognise our inability to respond to this crisis through anything other than ‘small-step policies’. We must recognise the need for a great leap forward, a great leap towards federalism in Europe.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, I think that either Europe will become federal or it will cease to exist. The choice is as simple as that. We must stop being afraid of words and afraid of using the word ‘federal’ when we talk about the future of Europe. It is, in fact, a federal solution that is needed, a solution that will give us a real economic government, which we need, real democratic control, which we do not have at the moment, a real European

treasury and a real federal budget, and, why not, in the future, a solution that will lead us one day towards a real European army.

We have no choice. European federalism is the only way of integrating ourselves into globalisation, the only way of negotiating on an equal footing and the only way of maintaining our economic and political role. It is also the only way of protecting our social model in Europe.

I also believe, Mr President, that now is the time, on this 9 May, to turn over a new page, a page of illusion. The illusion of those who believe that only austerity will get us out of the crisis, but also the illusion of those who think that growth will be able to return without putting Member States' public finances in order. It is a big mistake to have played one against the other in recent years. We do not need to choose between discipline and solidarity, between austerity and growth; we need both: growth and austerity, discipline and solidarity.

And, more concretely, the Fiscal Compact. The Fiscal Compact must not be changed but growth must be added to the Fiscal Compact, and the capital of the European Investment Bank must be increased. All the European funds available must be deployed. And finally, project bonds – how long have we talked about them here in this House – must see the light of day.

Secondly, mutualisation of the debt redemption fund is needed. Let us pay less interest to the bond holders so that the new money becomes available for investment and for growth in Europe. My conclusion of 9 May is clear: if we as the European Union want to survive, we need federalism, European federalism. Federalism is not something to be afraid of: federalism is the future of our continent and its future starts now on 9 May.

(Applause)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you Mr Verhofstadt. Perhaps we will be able to continue in this direction because, actually, if we are talking about 9 May, if we are talking about Europe, if we are talking about all that we have achieved, we must also talk about what we must achieve so that the future belongs to European citizens.

We must take what is happening today in the elections seriously, because if there is a democratic deficit in Europe, we must face up to it. If the federal Europe that we want is to be democratic, it must be capable of responding to the problems and anxieties of the citizens.

When I see the elections today in Greece and that the only solution that the Central Bank has found is to say: 'There is no alternative to what has been decided', I would say to the Central Bank: 'Watch out! Watch out! Remember European history. Remember the history of Germany. Remember the Treaty of Versailles'. When we say to the people: 'There is no solution', the people find solutions that are sometimes horrible. We have a duty to remember history. When someone says, in democracy: 'There is no alternative', they are wrong. Democracy is always about seeking alternatives; otherwise, politics is not worthwhile.

Therefore, I am saying something very straightforward. If we do not want Greece to vote once, twice, three times, four times, until they finally fall to their knees and say: 'We are sorry, sorry Europe, now we will do what you want', we must today reopen this memorandum, we must discuss this memorandum, we must propose something to the Greek people, because if we do not propose anything to them, the next election will produce

exactly the same result. Reopening the memorandum is not the same as saying: 'We do not need to make structural reforms'. It is simply saying that the Greek people need to be capable of keeping up with the reforms, so that they are not suffocated, strangled, made thirsty or starved by these policies being imposed on them. If we do not manage to provide this response, they will provide ultra-fascist, ultra-reactionary, ultra-Nazi, ultra-Stalinist, ultra, ultra responses ... and this will be aimed against us.

Secondly, the French people have voted, and everyone knows that I was on the side of the man who won. Yet what I do not understand from other Europeans is that you cannot, however, say to the French people who have just voted, after a tense election: 'Listen, whether it is Hollande or Sarkozy, you have to do the same thing'. If that is the case, it is not worth voting, it is not worth changing, it is not worth doing anything.

If, today, the French people, by a not particularly large majority – and the situation will be very difficult – decide that change is needed, all of Europe will have to consider how we can change. If Mr Monti listens carefully to what is happening in Italy – and we have seen it in the local elections – this will have to change somewhat in Italy too. In Spain, Mr Rajoy knows that it must change somewhat as well.

It is obvious, therefore, that today, it is not a question of always repeating the same thing between stability, growth, etc. We must give hope to the European people. This hope cannot come from national budgets. That means that we Europeans, we must take hope into our hands for the European people. What is hope? It is a European budget, it is our own resources – and Mr Verhofstadt is right – but to strengthen the European Investment Bank, to create a lever of and establish a programme for a green new deal, for an ecological transformation of the European economy.

We must create employment, if necessary by borrowing through the European Investment Bank, in order to restart the economy. Then, with the European budget that we will have, we will be able to partly reimburse this recovery. If we do not restart the European economy, if we stop, if we say: 'No, no, you will see, everything will be fine', we are heading for disaster. The neoliberal economy has led us to disaster. It has to be said, it has to be said to all the governments that, if we do not change the rhythm of our economies, we will all be heading for disaster.

I would like to finish with something very simple. There is said to be a danger facing the economy. Of course, but there is another danger: a danger facing democracy. If the people no longer believe we are capable of managing our lives, of managing the necessary changes, history shows us that the people do not gravitate towards the revolution that will save us all, but the one that will lead us to horror.

We have a democratic duty to show that, today, there is a possibility of rebalancing our European policies, of putting the European budget, of putting Europe, rightly, at the centre of the necessary transformation so that the European people can say 'Yes, they were right, 60 years ago, to create the European Union'. We must redefine this reason and then the future will belong to us; if not, it will belong to the markets and not the European people.

Martin Callanan, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, Schuman, Monnet and Spinelli all lived in a very different Europe to the one of today. In their Europe, the continent had been ravaged by two world wars. In their Europe, the household challenge was putting food on the table. The global challenge became symbolised by a wall across Berlin. Their solutions were ever-closer union, the European social model and the common agricultural

policy. In their day, those policies helped to achieve some of their objectives. Enlargement to the east brought freedom to a people previously cloaked by an iron curtain.

But the world has moved on since the Schuman Declaration was made 62 years ago and sadly, in many areas, the EU has not. Many of those 20th century solutions have now become a part of the 21st century problem. The EU is not only becoming irrelevant in the world, but also in the minds of many of our own people. I have one simple explanation for that. The people do not trust the EU because the EU does not trust the people.

Democracy, the rule of the people, is the greatest Greek export in history and it is under threat. The euro, the Fiscal Compact, the impositions of the troika and endless EU legislation have stopped our electors from having the power to determine their own destinies. We cannot go on taking the people for granted. If we do, they will turn to ugly alternatives. Sadly, communists and neo-Nazis who want to place landmines on the Greek border are now a major part of the Greek Parliament. Ms Le Pen received a fifth of the vote in France. And yet what was the Commission's response to the first-round upset in France? More Europe is needed, we were told by a spokesman. To me, nothing better sums up everything that is wrong with the EU than that reaction.

We feel that we have all of the answers and the Commission's Schuman Day statement just backs up that assumption. But often our well-intentioned actions become part of the problem and lead to less personal or economic freedom for individuals. To paraphrase a famous quote of President Reagan, the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: 'I am from the EU and I am here to help'. I am a firm believer that small government works. When national governments have rolled back the frontiers of the state, they have found that their people and their economies thrive. The EU has become a big government. It is time to roll back its frontiers.

Many people have suggested that Sunday's election was a victory for pro-growth politicians replacing pro-austerity politicians. That is, of course, nonsense. Everybody that I know – maybe apart from a few of the Greens – actually wants growth. The battle is over means and not ends. Sustainable growth requires profitably producing and selling more goods and services. Getting the EU to borrow and spend even more money to create fake demand at a time when national debts are already spiralling out of control is not pro-growth. It is stupid, it is unsustainable and it will bring national bankruptcy a step closer for many states.

My group is happy to offer an alternative vision for the future of the EU based on liberty, national democracy and proper entrepreneur-led growth. We believe that free trade is the best way to promote our products and our values across the globe. We believe that the EU budget should be better focused, smaller and reprioritised to 21st century challenges such as research. We believe that the single market should be the jewel in the crown of the EU, promoting deregulation and competition rather than red tape and harmonisation.

Seven years ago in this Chamber, following the French and Dutch rejections of the European constitution, one of the north-east constituents of Stephen Hughes and myself, Prime Minister Tony Blair, told this Chamber that people are blowing the trumpets around the city walls. Are we listening? I think we know the answer to the question that he posed, but the trumpets are sounding even louder now today than they were in 2005.

We have to ask ourselves whether we are, in fact, listening to what the people have to say today, because the EU faces clear choices. We can continue to pass more legislation, we

can have ten-year economic plans, or we can cut red tape and lift the burden on businesses. We can continue to believe that we know best or we can trust the people to know what is right. We can continue with the mantra of an ever-closer union or we can build an effective union that does less, but does it better. It is not too late to face reality, to trust the people and to embrace small government in Brussels, but time is rapidly running out. Unless we change course, the world will keep turning and Europe will fall further and further behind in the international competitive league table – and we will only have ourselves to blame.

IN THE CHAIR: RAINER WIELAND

Vice-President

Nigel Farage, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Mr President, happy Schuman Day, or Europe Day as you now call it, although I thought the celebrations were rather muted. The only bit of real passion we had was Mr Schulz slagging off the English, but that now appears to be a sort of popular sport in this Parliament.

When people stand up and talk about the great success that the EU has been, I am not sure anybody saying it really believes it themselves anymore. I think we are celebrating the wrong day. We should not be celebrating 9 May; we should be celebrating 8 May: Victory in Europe Day. We should celebrate the last time the Germans tried to smash the continent and they foundered and at least half the continent got its democracy back.

What we are celebrating on 9 May is another attempt, through different means, to smash democracy across Europe. I do not doubt for a minute that Jean Monnet was well intentioned at the start; he thought that if you abolish nation states, you would stop there ever being another war. He did not, at the time, of course, have the benefit of seeing that theory as it played out in Yugoslavia. But, like Communism, this has all gone badly wrong and the EU Titanic has now hit the iceberg. It is a European Union of economic failure, of mass unemployment, of low growth but, worst of all, it is an EU with the economic prism of the euro and this now poses huge dangers to the continent. We face the prospect of mass civil unrest, possibly even revolution, in some countries that are being driven into total and utter desperation.

But there is perhaps an opportunity; there is perhaps some good news. Now a democratic rebellion has begun. It began in Finland last year with the True Finns getting nearly 20% of the vote and we are seeing in country after country new political movements on the Right and on the Left making big scores. But that may not be all good news because what we saw in Greece last Sunday was rather reminiscent of the German election of 1932. We saw the status quo Centre collapse and the extremes of Right and Left rise.

You know, this project could even cause the rebirth of National Socialism in Europe. We are headed the wrong way. We must break up the eurozone; we must set those Mediterranean countries free; we must try to build a Europe. I want a Europe, but a Europe based on trade, a Europe based on cooperation, a Europe based on us sitting round the table and agreeing sensible rules on crime and the environment. We can do all of those things but we cannot do them if we are asked to rally behind that flag. I owe no allegiance to that flag and nor do most of the people in Europe either.

(Applause from the EFD Group)

Patrick Le Hyaric, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (FR) Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking Parliament and yourself, Mr President, for paying tribute to our colleague, Miguel Portas, just a moment ago.

The President paid a beautiful tribute to Europe, but the reality for the people is not the one that has been described. If European policies are not henceforth profoundly redirected, there are serious risks of the European Union imploding, with serious consequences for the people.

The fast-track austerity applied to the people while wealth is monopolised by a privatising minority is not only unfair but it is, today, totally inefficient. We must therefore draw conclusions from it, and fast.

It is important to take into account what has just happened in the last few days: the rejection of the austerity plan in the Romanian Parliament, then in the Netherlands, François Hollande's victory in France, the defeat of all the pro-austerity parties in the local elections in Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and Germany and lastly, the rejection of austerity in Greece. We must respect the Greek people's vote, seek a new path with the left and abandon the Troika's memorandum.

We cannot accept Mr Sarkozy and Ms Merkel's fiscal austerity treaty. Furthermore, the addition of a so-called 'growth' protocol is totally antagonistic to the treaty itself. We must therefore abandon it and seek another path. We must invent it, invent a new pact for human, social and ecological development, with a special financial fund, with a new role for the European Central Bank, which should provide loans for development, in other words, to improve purchasing power, creating and securing employment, innovation, research, the creation of new public services and ecological developments in our continent. There, we have a completely different future which can be achieved.

The European Investment Bank, whose capital should also be increased, a new use for Structural Funds, a tax on financial transactions and a harmonised tax on capital would be levers for such a human development fund to which we could add the monetary creation of the European Central Bank for states and not for banks.

Instead of competition, let us draw up a European minimum salary and minimum wage, as well as an action plan against poverty. At the same time, it would be wise to declare a moratorium on part of the past debts and to ask the European Central Bank to lend directly to Member States at a rate of 1%. In this regard, I should like the Commission and the Council to draft a report on the use of the EUR 1 000 billion that the European Central Bank has lent to private banks.

Lastly, faced with the seriousness of the situation and the threats that exist, I propose that Parliament take the initiative of a broad European forum with all the national parliaments, economic and social committees, trade unions and associations to move towards a complete reform of the European Union.

Francisco Sosa Wagner (NI). – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we are experiencing great controversy, the key reference points of which are the concepts of austerity and growth. If we listen to the noise that is building, it would seem that the idea of growth were a brilliant modern-day invention. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Since 1997, the so-called Stability and Growth Pact has reigned supreme in Europe. As a result of this, a great many of the policies that the European institutions have implemented

– such as cohesion policy, regional policy and research policy – are policies designed to create growth and pursue the development and well-being of the citizens.

Therefore, and I am saying this to the Commission and the Members of this Parliament who have a better chance of making themselves heard, there is no issue on our part when it comes to being in this debate, which we can face with our heads held high. That is my minority opinion among the Non-attached Members.

President. – I would point out that expressions of approval or disapproval from the gallery are not part of parliamentary custom.

The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) The European economies have been held hostage to the near-criminal irresponsibility of the global financial sector, at a time when they were already in a downward trend, due in part to the changes in the distribution of wealth between the West and the emerging economies. We did not question the rules of the game, and we have allowed countries with high levels of social protection to be penalised. Where we were supposed to have social market economies, we now have a decline in living standards, more inequality and big business profits taking a larger share of national income to the detriment of wages. In this debate on the future of Europe, it is important to stand up for an alternative of hope for Europe, by underscoring the need for ‘more Europe’ and a coherent economic approach based on shared responsibility, growth and equality. From now on, budget management must be based on public spending restraint, productive investment and a fair taxation system, with the private sector contributing its fair share to the collective effort, and an all-out battle against evasion, fraud and tax havens. Social justice is now essential for Europe’s recovery.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Today, we celebrate Europe Day, a European integration project that began over 50 years ago, founded on a pact between sovereign nations that decided to share a common destiny and to exercise a growing part of their sovereignty together, a Europe founded on common values, which wants to ensure peace, security, human dignity, democracy, justice, solidarity, sustainable development and quality of life for its 500 million citizens.

At a time when the crisis is confronting us with new challenges and difficulties, it is important to strengthen the common project, because nationalist illusions would only lead us to isolation and failure. On the contrary, we must strive even more for a genuine common voice, restore dignity to the principle of European solidarity, face up to the problem of population decline and, at the same time, the enormous growth in migratory pressures, tackle the economic crisis that still persists, increase levels of economic growth, ensure the sustainability of the European economy and strengthen the single currency, whilst reducing our high levels of unemployment, with a special focus on young people. The Europe we want to be proud of is one that puts people first, one that is not limited to the common market, a Europe of the citizens and of respect for human rights.

Tadeusz Cymański (EFD), *in writing.* – (PL) The experience of the last few years shows how dogmatic thinking leads to failure and even disaster. Faith in the financial security of the euro area lies in ruins. What effect will the elections in France and the situation in Greece have on what action is taken next? I do not think there should be any doubt. The debate on the future of Europe must not take place without asking how to ensure an equitable

distribution of the costs of getting out of the crisis. This question concerns Europe as a whole, but it also needs to be asked in individual Member States. I say this as a representative of a Member State in which social inequalities are among the worst in Europe.

Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) We have debated Europe's future between these walls on numerous occasions. The problem is not that we are repeatedly putting this highly complex topic on the agenda, but that, as the French and Greek elections have demonstrated, we are not capable of outlining a vision with perspective for European citizens, and young people in particular. That is especially sad today, when we are celebrating Europe. But what are we actually celebrating when, in many cases, we do not defend European achievements resolutely enough, we do not agree on the European values once held in common, and we do not stand up for one another when real solidarity is needed?

It is said that 'true friends are revealed in times of trouble'. The crisis, unfortunately, has shown precisely that we are not on the right path, since exceptions are made for some, while others are repeatedly hauled over the coals. We commit ourselves in vain to the principles of higher employment levels, greater economic growth and lifelong learning when every fifth young person in Europe is unemployed and feels that their situation is hopeless. It appears that we framed the Fiscal Compact Treaty in vain if there are Member States that have not even signed it and Member States that wish to debate again the agreement that was reached through tough negotiations. It is really heart-rending that we are experiencing this today, 62 years after the establishment of the EU, but it may not be too late to realise that Europe needs a complete change of direction.

András Gyürk (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) The Greek and French election results indicate that a significant proportion of European citizens do not feel the European Union to be their own. We need to listen to their voices because they are also sending the message that the EU is not paying sufficient attention to the questions that matter. For example, too little is said about the fact that almost one in five young Europeans are unemployed, and the rate of youth unemployment is as high as 50% in several countries. That question needs to be at the top of this week's agenda. Furthermore, too little is said about the fact that extremist forces, taking advantage of young people's disillusionment, are establishing serious strongholds across Europe. Radical movements are drawing up lists of Eastern European citizens and the use of double standards and offensive descriptions of other countries has become commonplace.

Too little is said about unsustainable demographic processes, namely, that for a long time now, fewer children are being born in Europe than is necessary to sustain the population. That will lead to major social tensions and cause welfare systems to collapse under the strain.

In order to overcome this situation, we need to get back to common basics, namely, those that established the EU. Above all, we need to strengthen communities in accordance with the basic principles of Christian democracy. Secondly, we need, to eliminate double standards and take action against extremist forces. And, thirdly, we need to restore respect for work. We need to remove the regulatory, legal and financial barriers to higher employment. Nothing else will get at the root of the problem.

Edit Herczog (S&D), *in writing.* – (HU) Europe has not flourished in the recent past. The negative effects of the global crisis are palpable today, too. Analysts also find themselves in a difficult situation, since such a deep recession has not been witnessed since modern society was established. The rift between groups supporting confederationist efforts and

eurosceptic groups rejecting deeper integration has become more apparent. With regard to Greece, there is the risk that the local elections will close with negative results that disregard European ideas. If the new Greek government coalition does not support the tough governmental measures, it is questionable whether Greece will receive the next instalment of the EU rescue package, which could put the euro area at even greater risk. The strengthening of eurosceptic, nationalist parties, which strikes fear in both young people and older generations, poses a great challenge both to Greece and to Europe as a whole.

Europe needs to find a way not only out of the economic, but also the demographic crisis. The earlier social model is unsustainable: with society ageing, young people feel that they do not have any prospects. Eastern European career starters envisage their future in the West, while those in Western Europe are looking to other continents, such as America, or even New Zealand. I cannot emphasise enough the fact that research and development, innovation, the strengthening of European industrial policy, the presentation of best practices and the promotion of investments are vital to Europe's future, nor can we ignore the 5 million young people who are unemployed. The time has come to take action for the sake of the future generation.

Alajos Mészáros (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) There is no alternative to European integration, which is why all ideas that would restrict the EU's powers, including the use of a common currency and the right to free movement guaranteed by the Schengen Area, are potentially dangerous. In European society, as in other developed countries, profit-oriented companies and associations generate a level of consumption that is unsustainable in the long term. The current state of crisis could continue for a long time yet, since we are dealing not only with a financial and economic crisis, but also with a moral crisis and a crisis of values. In my view, the restrictive measures of right-wing governments are capable of remedying the situation, with the potential to lead to renewed growth through financial consolidation. It is to be feared that the restrictive measures will slacken as a result of socialist governments gaining ground again, leading to society becoming further indebted. A suitable compromise needs to be reached between stimulating economic growth and taking restrictive measures.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (S&D), *in writing*. – The first step towards solving a problem is to admit that there is a problem. And Europe is confronted with a multitude of problems. Internally, it is affected by the largest and deepest crisis since the creation of the EU. Further integration has been slowed down considerably and the spectre of renationalising common policies is stronger and stronger. Moreover, the 'cure', through severe austerity, has created growing popular discontent, manifested in social and political instability. It also undermined solidarity among members, all that at a time when, externally, other power centres have begun to question Europe's centrality in the international system. Challenges are accumulating around Europe and all we do is slash our defence budgets, accelerating a haemorrhage of power in favour of our competitors, at a time when the US is re-orienting itself towards Asia and the Pacific. The sombreness of the picture should not dishearten us even further, but determine a resolution to turn the tables and change course upwards again. For that, 'austerity' – which has reached its limits – should give way to 'growth' and I salute our leaders' decision to make 'growth' their top priority.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) Austerity has not been, nor will it be, a viable solution for exiting the economic crisis. Austerity has resulted in two dreadful consequences: general poverty and extinguishing any hope of a better future for young people. Political events in recent weeks have highlighted that the French, Romanians and

British no longer believe in the measures imposed by right-wing governments. Youth unemployment is on the rise. This is why we need to invest in creating jobs and revitalising the economy. This period of austerity must come to an end today.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D), *in writing.* – (PL) Europeans think the most effective organisation trying to moderate the effects of the economic crisis is the European Union, and they think it is more effective than national authorities. The equality of women and men is of immense significance here. Women are the largest untapped labour resource, and most of the people living in poverty are women. We need more women in the labour market and in decision-making positions. Increasing the number of women in decision-making bodies can enhance effectiveness and innovativeness in the workplace and improve overall business performance, and this will help strengthen Europe's competitiveness.

It is also important to prevent unemployment among graduates and young people. One in five people under 25 in the EU cannot find work. This is a tragedy for Member States and for the young people themselves, who, at the beginning of their working lives, already feel they are socially redundant. It is crucial to support small and medium-sized enterprises, because SMEs created 85% of new jobs in the EU between 2002 and 2010 and have suffered most as a result of the crisis.

The future of Europe means, above all, the future and welfare of its citizens. In accordance with the principles of the 2020 strategy, the rights, prosperity and solidarity of Europeans are at the heart of the EU's agenda. Therefore, we need a Europe which is effective in tackling poverty among Europeans, violence against women and all forms of discrimination. Currently, the most important challenge is to maintain and develop trust among the citizens.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) Every year, on 9 May, European citizens celebrate Europe Day. More than half a century after the declaration made by Robert Schuman, European citizens are united and espouse the same values that have delivered peace and prosperity to EU Member States. Nowadays, the EU, like other regions and countries in the world, is facing a serious economic and social crisis. According to recent statistics from Eurostat, in March 2012, 25.7 million EU citizens were unemployed, marking a rise of 2.1 million compared with March 2011. In some countries the unemployment rate has reached alarming levels (Spain 24%, Greece 21%), with young people being the group hit hardest. Young Europeans are the future of the EU, and it is our duty to provide them with a decent education and offer them the chance to contribute to the development of society, at least like previous generations have done. The future of the EU must be based on solidarity, strengthening the European social model, creating the conditions for economic growth, completing the single market and, above all, on creating jobs across the whole of Europe. The EU needs to invest in transport, energy, agriculture, education, health and, in particular, in research and innovation so that it can be competitive globally.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) On 9 May, Europe Day is celebrated to commemorate the Schuman Declaration of 1950. This declaration laid the foundations of European economic integration, and this later became the basis of political integration. There is no doubt that it was a decisive moment, one which brought about closer peacetime cooperation. Europe today has been hit by an economic crisis, but the European Union is doing well in this very difficult examination. The community which has been built over the past 60 years is showing that it is not one which, in a crisis, selfishly guards only its

own interests, and is keeping up its efforts to help other countries which are many times weaker. One fundamental lesson can be drawn from this, which may, for some, be a source of comfort, but which, for others, may also be a warning. The EU has reached a level of integration which makes the effects of uncertainty in one Member State perceptible in the others.

Naturally, this is proof that integration has been successful – the objective was, after all, to achieve just such a European structure. It should, however, be remembered that in these conditions, we need to be extremely vigilant and careful. As things stand, we have been able to rescue the euro. By working together, we have been able to give financial assistance to the countries which have been hardest hit by the crisis. Today, the objective of each individual Member State and of all of us together is to protect the European economy. Our future depends on our making responsible decisions. We must work together now as never before. The most important objective for the European Union today is to overcome the crisis and build a common future.

Iuliu Winkler (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) Today, 9 May, we are debating the future of Europe during the European Parliament plenary. In the elections which have taken place in the last year in EU Member States, citizens have voted for change. If we examine the ideological slant of this change, we see that the right was replaced by the left in France, while the reverse has happened in Spain. What do these winners have in common? They have made fairly populist promises to halt the austerity policies and fulfil the expectations of those who want to maintain Europe's welfare state, which is a matter of concern for everyone. This now raises the question whether, after the crisis, Europe's welfare state can return to what it was at the end of the 20th century. The EU can no longer operate just as an economic union and single market, like the UK wants. It can no longer stand firm merely as an intergovernmental union of nation states from the 20th century. It will disintegrate. The EU must become a federal Europe, a Europe of regions and communities, with its institutions in Brussels having clearly defined areas of competence, offset by the Eurocrats' transparent accountability to Europe's 500 million citizens. In fact, the unquestionable lack of democracy in today's European integration process can only be remedied by enhancing the role of the European Parliament.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) More and more, the European Union is showing its true nature – that of capitalist integration which only seeks to benefit the big economic and financial groups, integration that satisfies their expansionist zeal to conquer new markets, to have easier access to cheap labour and resources, and to deregulate areas like public services so as to hand them over to private enterprise. Given the crisis that capitalism has caused through financial speculation, what solution does the EU have to offer its people? A solution that only an imperialist bloc could offer: more labour exploitation and the creation of mechanisms that transfer the wealth created by the workers to capitalist monopolies. These so-called austerity measures are nothing more than that: the direct transfer of wages, retirement pensions, social benefits and subsidies, and the huge profits that privatised public sectors and services can offer, directly into the hands of big business. The workers and the people want another future for Europe, and they have demonstrated this through massive social struggles.

17. Roaming on public mobile communications networks within the Union (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Angelika Niebler, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on the proposal for a regulation of the European

Parliament and of the Council on roaming on public mobile communications networks within the Union (recast)

(COM(2011)0402 - C7-0190/2011 - 2011/0187(COD)) (A7-0149/2012).

Angelika Niebler, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Wammen, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I assume that each of you here in plenary has a smartphone and that you use them all the time, wherever you are – whether you are out and about at home, in your own country, or in Europe, whether you are on holiday or on business. We here in Parliament are by no means exceptional; our citizens are also permanently mobile and on the move in Europe. Our young people, in particular, are constantly online nowadays.

That is why I am particularly pleased that tomorrow, we will be able to adopt the Roaming III Regulation, as it is known, which will enter into force on 1 July 2012. In other words, just in time for the holiday season, we will be able to give our citizens the benefit of lower tariffs when they use smartphones in Europe. The future belongs to mobile devices. These days, everyone is mobile 24 hours a day. In recent years, there has been a huge increase in data transfer via smartphones in particular, and we will see further huge increases in the years ahead.

In contrast, the costs of using a mobile phone abroad are still extremely high; indeed, they have hardly come down at all. That is unacceptable. The charges must reflect reality. We cannot allow people using smartphones at home or in another European country to be charged many times what they have to pay at home for making calls, sending or receiving texts or downloading data. I can tell you that I am with a German provider, and at the beginning of this week, my provider informed me that I will have to pay EUR 8.20 if I download one megabyte of data here in Brussels. That is a complete rip-off, and we cannot allow it to continue.

What, then, will the new Roaming Regulation do? Its main aim is reduced charges for all our citizens. We hope to achieve this by creating greater competition in the roaming market in future. We are introducing maximum charges, and one particularly new element is a maximum retail charge for data transfer. The first maximum retail charge will take effect on 1 July 2012. In future, one megabyte will cost no more than EUR 0.70. The charges will be lowered further from 1 July 2013, when a maximum retail charge of EUR 0.45 per megabyte will come into force. The third price reduction will take effect on 1 July 2014, when the maximum charge will become EUR 0.20 per megabyte. We had to fight hard for these maximum retail charges in tough negotiations with the Council. I would like to extend my great thanks to my shadow rapporteurs and, in particular, to the rapporteur for the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, Robert Goebbels. Had we not fought so hard for better charges, then we would not be today where we hope to be after 1 July.

The market will also be opened up to new providers without a network of their own, in what is known as an open access solution. Moreover, from 1 July 2014, consumers will be able to choose roaming services from providers other than their national provider. This proposed solution is known as unbundling and, in future, European customers will also be able to use local services when travelling abroad – known as local break-out – by being able to choose the best offer from the various local operators, as is already the case for WLAN access.

We have also introduced consumer protection rules. In future, these will apply not just within Europe, but also outside the European Union. The obligation to send a warning when users reach a certain tariff level, a certain level of charges, will also apply abroad. Other consumer protection rules have also been introduced in order to prevent involuntary roaming.

All in all, I can say that today is a good day for our citizens of Europe. I am pleased that from 1 July, charges will be reasonable, even for roaming.

(Applause)

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I very much welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate which precedes your vote tomorrow. It goes without saying that I also welcome the fact that this dossier has been brought to a successful conclusion, and I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Ms Niebler as rapporteur.

Further work on completing the single market is a top priority at a time when the EU needs to stimulate growth and create opportunities for employment. That is why the Danish Presidency is investing so much time and energy in the single market and the digital single market, including in key areas such as telecoms and the information society. Services provided by modern electronic means of communication such as mobile devices are now straggling the boundaries between telecommunication and the information society. Web access, mobile applications and the transfer of data and images are increasingly concerns. They are the drivers of those rapid advances in technology which are changing the very way we think about information transfer.

At a time when markets and jobs are increasingly global in scale, it is vital for businesses and consumers to be able to use a full range of services accessible via mobile phones, tablets and other devices, irrespective of their location. They need to be able to access these services when travelling and wherever they are conducting business. It is therefore essential for Europe's competitiveness that we create as seamless a market as possible for such services. That means improving the conditions for roaming and bringing prices closer to those of the domestic markets.

This is a process that has been under way now for several years. Significant advances have been made through a series of important steps. Today, we have reached the third step, with the Roaming III Regulation. On behalf of the Council, I would like to welcome the agreement reached with Parliament on this important issue. It will help ensure lower prices for roaming customers by introducing greater competition in the roaming market. This is something which is particularly welcome to those in Europe who depend on cross-border information transfer for their businesses and for individual use. It is important that, with close cooperation between the Commission, the Council and Parliament, we have managed to cover all the key elements in the original proposal, including price caps on all the services that are available through roaming.

In our view, the agreement before us respects a set of essential principles, including the need to have an agreed text in place by 1 July of this year: the requirement for the new regulation to be technology-neutral rather than to make technology choices which could soon be out of date; the commitment to ensure that the structural solutions of the new regulations lead to more competition and thus – hopefully – even lower prices for EU citizens in the medium to longer term; the need to continue with a price cap mechanism

as a temporary safety mechanism for as long as is necessary for the structural solutions to take effect; and the need to fully involve the body of European regulation for electronic communication in the technical implementation of the regulation and maintain consistency with other relevant legislative or political contexts, such as the regulatory framework for electronic communications or the Digital Agenda for Europe.

Europe's citizens will be able to take advantage of this new regulation very shortly. It will save them money and increase their access to a wider market. That has to be a positive development. It is a sign that the institutions of the European Union are working for the direct benefit of our citizens.

By way of conclusion, I would like to thank both Parliament and the Commission for the excellent cooperation during negotiations. I would like to express our gratitude to the Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, the rapporteur, Ms Niebler, and the shadow rapporteurs for the excellent way in which they have handled these important negotiations.

Tomorrow, this Parliament will vote on the regulation. If endorsed, it will bring direct benefits to Europeans. It is an important step which will ensure that consumers will enjoy even lower roaming prices, while, at the same time, it will stimulate much needed competition in the area and thus increase Europe's competitiveness and encourage growth. This is what Europe needs: concrete results for the benefit of our citizens, creating growth and jobs.

Neelie Kroes, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Mr President, Mr Schuman would be proud of this institution, together with the Council and the Commission, delivering results that can be recognised by the citizens.

I want to start by paying tribute to Angelika Niebler, who has done an extremely good job with her team-mates. The Danish Presidency took everything into account to fulfil what we had in mind, delivering results before the conclusion of their very fruitful Presidency.

It is perhaps one of those examples in which we can prove that together, and in a European context, in a digital single market we can make it easier for citizens to travel and also take into account everything connected with travelling. With this new Roaming Regulation – and hopefully the voting tomorrow will be positive, but I am sure that will be the case – the basis of the Commission's proposal is recognisable in this regulation.

Let me remind you what is at stake. These days – as Angelika has already said – mobiles are everywhere. People expect to use their phones wherever they go, especially across internal borders, which are supposed to have disappeared. We are talking about a borderless Europe. A Europe of smartphones, data tablets and data online content means a tremendous boom in mobile data. In that context, high roaming charges are an irritant for a citizen and also an obstacle to a single market.

People are fed up with nasty surprises when they open their bill. Today, we can put an end to them once and for all, for voice, text and data. We can show how the EU protects citizens' interests. That is what Mr Schuman had in mind. The agreement we have in front of us will do this in three ways.

Firstly, we now have a future-proof solution. Injecting competition into the roaming markets will mean, for the first time ever, a structural and sustainable way to protect consumers, because competition is the best guarantee of long-term low prices. Under the

new rules, mobile users are empowered to pick the roaming provider right for their travel needs, separately from their domestic provider. So this is a big step forward. Companies will be able to compete through innovative services, which is also a big step forward.

Secondly, also for the first time ever, we are tackling data roaming. People who want to browse abroad should not be held back by a fear of high charges. Angelika mentioned that this should be a signal for us, and what is at stake with this proposal, which will be much more acceptable. High charges are a constraint on citizens, on businesses and on economic growth. This agreement removes that constraint on all three, by capping data charges and by letting people choose their data roaming provider, perhaps just as easily as they choose a wi-fi network.

Thirdly, also for the first time ever, we are extending protection beyond the EU, with better on-the-spot information and warnings about roaming charges, to avoid nasty bill surprises when you get home. We can deliver this with this agreement too.

Of course, you should not see this agreement in isolation. Roaming is just one piece in a much bigger story. We are promoting competition and lower consumer prices – as we have done with mobile termination rates and continue to do in telecoms markets. We are putting Europe at the forefront of the data revolution, through access to cheap data, as we could also do with our proposals to open up public sector data – a great challenge in front of us. We are building a digital single market with consistent rules so that Europeans can easily enjoy great content, wherever they are and whatever device they are using – as we will be doing through our proposals on the cloud, data protection, e-ID and many more.

I hope with all those we can enjoy a success like the one we are celebrating today. This is a stimulus to do a lot more for the consumer. What does this mean for a family for example? A family will save over EUR 200 on their summer holiday compared with 2007 prices. This summer holiday, a business person will save more than EUR 1 000 per year. Data prices are kept for the first time so that you can use your maps, Facebook and videos at a fair price. Overall, there is a saving of 75% compared with 2007. Yes, you heard that right – a 75% saving. Price caps will be in place until 2017 and there will be full competition from 2014, when choosing a roaming plan will be like choosing a wi-fi network.

This is the proof that the EU is good for citizens. We are putting money back in your pocket and making markets work fairly. This is also good for businesses because it lowers costs. For the mobile operators, the better prices will attract new customers and grow the market. We have ended the rip-off once and for all.

(Applause)

Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection.* – (PL) Mr President, the roaming regulation we are going to put to the vote tomorrow is unquestionably a great success, and Ms Niebler is not just a consummate professional; she also carries out her duties as a Member with elegance and courtesy. I will, however, take the liberty of saying frankly and very undiplomatically that I expected the European Commission to put forward a far bolder proposal. We – Parliament and the Commission – are, after all, both EU institutions and we should be working together to eliminate barriers in the European Union and fight for a single market, but instead not only did we have to conduct difficult negotiations with the Council – working with the Danish Presidency is a real pleasure – but we had to secure a very substantial reduction, of at least half, in the Commission's proposals. So I hope that

further proposals on digital policy will take greater account of rapidly changing technologies, the changing times and the rapidly changing needs of the citizens and of businesses, because – as the Commissioner said – there is still a lot more to be done in this area.

Pilar del Castillo Vera, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (ES) Mr President, allow me to also begin by personally congratulating Ms Niebler for having led so professionally and so successfully, on Parliament's behalf, the third regulation on roaming on public mobile communications networks within the Union, now known as 'Roaming III'.

Not only has it been a success – as far as I can see – by substantially lowering the upper limits of what operators can charge consumers for mobile services when they are in another EU Member State, but the proposal for a regulation that we will vote on in this plenary session also includes other measures such as, for example, extending transparency clauses to European consumers travelling to non-Member States.

However, above all, the greatest merit of the Roaming III Regulation is – in my view – its desire to become obsolete and create a competitive market for roaming services themselves, where it will no longer be necessary to regulate the situation in each of the different 27 markets every two years, but rather the situation in the single market, which should represent the European Union.

This regulation, which we will vote on tomorrow, will not only be limited on this occasion to establishing new maximum tariffs that mobile phone operators must respect when European consumers travel outside the European Union, but, for the first time, we are tackling the situation – in my view, in a much more intelligent way – by establishing a competitive market.

If the structural measures proposed in the regulation are successful, we European consumers will have the option of taking out a roaming contract with a different operator to the one providing us with mobile services in our own country, and we will be able to do this simply and keep our phone number. It is an essential contribution to the development of the digital single market.

Robert Goebbels, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Mr Wammen, Commissioner, lower prices will be applied to voice calls, SMS and data in favour of all European consumers from 1 July, then again from 1 July 2013, and finally from 1 July 2014.

These reductions will be important because Parliament has called for them and implemented them. In this regard, I would like to thank all my colleagues who have formed a united front when it was needed against the Council and the Commission and I would like, above all, to thank Angelika Niebler, who was an exemplary rapporteur.

The Commission's initial proposal was not very ambitious. It essentially aimed to lower wholesale prices in order to boost competition, which is largely inexistent among operators. The Council was divided. Many states remain under the influence of their old national monopolies. The Council was therefore seeking to maintain the profits of these national telecommunications champions.

That is precisely where the problem lies in the mobile communication market in the European Union. The market is dominated by a cartel, or at least a *de facto* cartel. Four major groups – Vodafone, Deutsche Telekom, Orange and Telefónica Movistar – share some 80% of the mobile communication market in the EU. They are present in all, or nearly

all, national markets, either directly or in conjunction with national operators. However, these groups, which all operate at EU level, want, at all costs, to keep national borders in order to impose roaming charges.

I am among those who believe in the need for competition, the famous invisible hand that was so dear to Adam Smith. However, I believe even more in the need to manage the very visible hand of public authorities in order to intervene in markets and impose price reductions where necessary.

Parliament has just taken an important step towards the progressive abolition of unjustified and unjustifiable roaming charges. Our aim must remain a large internal market which also applies to mobile communications. The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament in particular has succeeded in insisting that the Commission present a report evaluating developments in prices in the market no later than 30 June 2016.

I will quote Article 19(2): 'If the report shows that the structural measures provided for by this regulation have not been sufficient to promote competition in the internal market for roaming services for the benefit of all European consumers, or that the differences between roaming tariffs and national tariffs have not approached zero, the Commission shall make appropriate proposals to the European Parliament and the Council to address this situation and thus achieve an internal market for mobile communication services, ultimately with there being no difference between national and roaming tariffs'.

Commissioner, such is and remains our ambition and I know that the vast majority of MEPs support us in this respect.

What we will vote on tomorrow, ladies and gentlemen, is, in fact, a gift for all Europeans for Europe Day, which we are celebrating today. It is a gift that will be very much appreciated because, as Angelika Niebler but also the Commissioner have just said, today, everyone needs their mobile telephone or these other devices that form the world of modern communication.

Jens Rohde, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, Commissioner Kroes, Mr President of the Council, my good friend Nicolai Wammen, honoured colleague Ms Niebler: it appears to me that you are very happy and satisfied today. Well, you should be; we should all be.

However, I think it is safe to say that we Liberals do not like price regulations, but for roaming this has proved necessary. Looking back at the history, we began to regulate prices due to a cartel-like situation, where a complete lack of competition in roaming services meant that operators could set their price levels as they pleased. It is not liberal when the market does not work and the consumers have no choice. So introducing price ceilings has been a necessary tool to try to bring costs down.

However, despite some progress, prices continue to be significantly higher than domestic mobile prices. The reason is quite simple: the market still does not work. The price caps might have pushed prices down, but it has not increased the competition. The average mobile roaming prices are pretty much identical to the regulated price caps. That is why the Liberal Group demanded more competition from the beginning, and that has also been our main priority in the negotiations. It is not sustainable to undertake a revision every two or three years, so we need to break down the barriers between our national telecommunication markets to create market pressure to lower the prices.

We believe that the new roaming deal is a step in that direction: the combination of allowing access to independent operators on the big companies' networks and allowing for the separate sale of roaming services will give enough choice to consumers to simply dismiss those operators who demand ludicrous prices. Another crucial element that we fought hard for is the local break-out, allowing mobile users to access the Internet locally on a visited network – just like accessing a wi-fi hot spot. This is a new technology which can persuade mobile operators to realise that, unless they lower their prices, they will lose business.

But there is crucial implementation work to be done now to ensure that especially the structural solutions work. We will be following this process closely from Parliament, and hopefully we will not see each other here again in four years' time, as the market will be doing its job and providing competitive prices for all consumers.

Philippe Lamberts, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, I will continue along the same line as my previous colleagues.

Today, I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, it is true, I recognise in Ms Kroes the kind of liberal I like, a liberal who wants real competition on the market and who challenges all abuse from those in a dominant position. It is not for nothing that you used to be the Commissioner for Competition.

In any case, I would like to thank Angelika Niebler for having made considerable efforts to improve the Commission's proposal and also to take on these monopolies.

We can therefore, somehow, be pleased, as today we are seeing roaming and data prices on the market which can reach up to 10 000 times the cost price. Imagine that: 10 000 times the cost price! These are obviously extreme examples but they are part of the reality and we will reduce this, over time, to a ratio that will be, broadly speaking, around 50 times the cost price. We can therefore say: 'Hallelujah! We have gone from a ratio of 10 000 to a ratio of 50 – great progress!'

That being said, tell me, in which truly competitive market are there profit margins like this? How is it possible that, in an economy which is, in principle, a large market economy – a 'social market economy', yes, but a market economy nonetheless – we can still find margins like this? In French, it is what we would call a racket! The word is not French but you understand what I am talking about. The regulation that we are putting in place actually helps to keep this racket going. What we have seen in the past is that all the real prices converge at the fixed ceiling. This therefore means that there is no real competition.

I know that the Commission has made many efforts to develop structural measures that lead to real competition, but I agree with Mr Goebbels: how is it possible that these four large groups, which are *de facto* present throughout the internal market – we call this an internal market! – behave as though we were 27 impenetrably separated national markets? This is clearly unacceptable.

That is therefore the source of my bitterness with regard to the text that we will vote on tomorrow – we had voted against it in committee to encourage Ms Niebler to go further. However, we must indeed recognise that, if the text that we will adopt represents significant progress, it still has a long, long way to go in terms of consumer protection.

What I am hoping therefore, is that, in fact, as Jens Rohde said, we do not have to rule on new standards again in four years' time in terms of the price ceiling for roaming. This is

not normal. What I want to see is real competition. We saw what happened with *Free* in France. It is an effort at national market level. We need much more competition. The racket that telecommunications and mobile telephone operators practise is a racket that must stop, like all rackets in any self-respecting economy.

Edvard Kožušník, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (CS) Mr President, in order to understand this proposal better, we must go back to 2007, when the roaming regulation was introduced. It was said, at the time, that this would be a temporary measure, lasting for two years. The regulation was then extended to 2012. Now we are talking here about 2022. In European terms, temporary thus means at least 15 years.

On no account do I want to stand up for mobile operators in this place. It is well known that, at the very least, they acted in concert when setting roaming prices. However, five years of experience in the regulation of end user prices for roaming calls have proved the critics of this form of regulation right, since prices for end users have generally been held close to the upper limit. Price regulation should be no more than an emergency measure, applied when absolutely necessary, since any form of regulation hampers innovation.

The regulation we are debating, for example, proposes fixing the wholesale price of an SMS up to 2022, and thus for 10 years. It is as if we had sat down 10 years ago to determine today's price for sending a telegram, a service that has now completely died out.

Instead of price regulation, we should try to allow more market mechanisms into the telecoms environment. The proposal under debate may introduce an initially interesting novelty – the separate sale of domestic mobile services and regulated services. I would like to emphasise the word 'regulated'. In this way, we are again, unfortunately, creating not a new market environment, but only a kind of new quasi proposal with indirect regulation which will again suit just a few multinational, oligopolistic operators.

Niki Tzavela, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (EL) Mr President, as always, Ms Niebler has done an excellent job.

The most innovative aspect of this regulation is the move from simple price cuts to giving consumers the possibility of choosing a different operator for roaming services, while keeping their number. This is where competition can deliver lower prices for consumers, especially in times of crisis. BEREC now has the responsibility for ensuring that this is done in the simplest and most consumer-friendly way. If the solution is over-complicated, this regulation risks failing its objectives. For this reason, any technical solution detailed by BEREC should not be over-complicated or excessively burdensome for the mobile industry. My congratulations to the Commissioner.

Miloslav Ransdorf, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to make some comments on the submitted proposal. First, it is about the development and integration of our single European market. It applies to 380 million customers. This, in itself, represents progress. Customers get the possibility to make a free choice, and their protection is also beefed up. The third thing, which is extremely important in my opinion, is that small and medium-sized enterprises get a chance to access foreign networks, thereby strengthening competition. This will then be reflected in lower prices.

However, I believe that much remains to be done. For example, the promotion of unified model contracts, which would make market access possible. It is also necessary to ensure that operators cannot make up for alleged losses through the palliative of costlier domestic

calls. None of this, however, detracts from the importance of the text. I would like to thank Ms Niebler, who has pushed hard for this arrangement to be far more comprehensive than the previous one.

To those who say that this hinders market-based solutions, I would also like to point out the well-known fact that market liberalism is actually a form of protectionism favouring the privileged.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, from July onwards, which is just when the holiday season starts, roaming charges will be lowered, for example, to EUR 0.70 per megabyte for Internet connections. This means that smartphones can be used without incurring huge costs. The plans for more competition in the mobile communications market are particularly pleasing. From 2014, customers will be able to find the cheapest provider and buy their roaming services separately, even from foreign providers. Every time you cross a border, your mobile phone will automatically switch to the network of the provider you have selected, while your phone number remains the same.

Roaming charges are the only area in the EU where costs are incurred simply by crossing a border. All in all, this is the right approach to take. It is a very positive move, particularly in the light of the fact that the internal market has not always produced good results. I am thinking here of the ongoing social dumping caused by opening up the labour market in south-eastern Europe. Here, we have finally achieved something positive. We are moving in the right direction and congratulations are in order.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to thank both Ms Niebler and the Commissioner. Roaming is an example of how we are responding to the wishes of the citizens of Europe. Recently, a student from the University of Linz complained to me that she had paid EUR 3.60 a minute for a conversation that she had had in Brussels with her boyfriend in Munich, which would have cost her only EUR 0.07 per minute from home. The exorbitant bill that she received for a conversation lasting two hours was more expensive than her entire stay in Brussels.

Ms Reding has reacted quickly. We were able to adopt the Roaming I Regulation in record time, within a period of only seven months. For the first time, there was a sunset clause. As a result of the rapid introduction of rules at a European level, we are remaining up-to-date in this area and can offer our citizens corresponding benefits. This represents a huge advantage for consumers.

Many speakers today have emphasised that this is all about prices. I would like to dispute that. We are not regulating prices. Instead, we are making it clear at what point our citizens have the right to protection against abuse. We put our trust in the industry when it came to data roaming. The industry promised us that dramatic reductions would be forthcoming. This did not happen with Roaming II and that is why we now have this Roaming III Regulation. When you realise that you can still buy a one gigabyte data package in one Member State for EUR 4, that you may be forced to pay up to EUR 13 900 for this package elsewhere, and that in other countries outside Europe, the cost is currently between EUR 2 500 and EUR 3 500, it is clear that the reduction to EUR 700 is a huge step forward.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the fact that this figure will fall to EUR 200 by 2014. However, given that a figure of EUR 4 is normal at a national level, I am calling today for a Roaming IV Regulation.

Judith A. Merkies (S&D). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Ms Niebler, and Mr Goebbels in particular, thank you for this excellent result. We have reached an agreement quickly and this was essential because the current legislation will cease to apply in a few weeks' time. However, the maximum rates in the agreement are considerably lower than those originally proposed by the Commission.

The result is good for consumers, because they will notice the difference as early as this summer when they travel abroad. Phone calls and text messages will be cheaper. The real task, however, is doing something about data services. That will be a major intervention. Currently, the rates are however much you are prepared to pay, anything from EUR 3 per megabyte, but soon they will be a lot less, namely, EUR 0.70 per megabyte.

Today is Europe Day and we are celebrating Europe's past success stories. Certainly, intervention in the mobile phone market has been one of the success stories of Europe, but it is a success story of the past. My question is: will what we have done now be a success story of the future? I ask this because what we have decided now is a suboptimal solution. It is a solution which creates additional fuss for the consumer.

What lies at the core of the issue is separating national and international markets and this is all to do with dual IMSI, the dual SIM card and local break-out. Why do things in such a roundabout way? We could have made it a lot easier for everyone. Now, consumers will have to spend hours behind the computer in the evening trying to work out what contracts they need to choose. If the internal digital market is our objective, then why take this roundabout route?

There is, however, an optimal solution that we could have achieved much more quickly, and that is: 'roam like you are at home'. My question is whether it will come into being in 2016, without further intervention? The proposal, therefore, was that it should come into effect earlier. A genuine internal market is Europe's success story, as someone here has already said. So, we do not want any differences between national and European rates; the proposal by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats in the European Parliament was to phase out maximum rates and to then introduce a single rate in Europe from 1 July 2014. The advantages will be cheaper deals for consumers and a genuine internal communications market. 'Stop roaming now' was the motto.

I have a few more questions: namely, network neutrality has been included in the roaming agreement. The European Parliament has also adopted a resolution on the subject and the Dutch Parliament has passed a law to ensure network neutrality by preventing providers from being able to suddenly prioritise certain websites. Commissioner, you have said that you would put forward a proposal for network neutrality after the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) has completed a study (which took place on 6 March).

The success story must have a follow-up on the digital market.

Jürgen Creutzmann (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today's vote will introduce a regulation which brings direct added value for the citizens of Europe.

During the next summer holidays, mobile phone calls from abroad will be significantly cheaper and, for the first time, there will be price transparency outside Europe, which is also important. For me, an essential feature of this regulation is that we have not repeated the mistakes of Roaming I and Roaming II. It has become clear that simple price limits, which actually have the same effect as price fixing, do not lead to more competition.

Therefore, it is important for us to focus now on unbundling roaming services and national contracts for mobile communication services. We are creating a market which will lead to low prices of its own accord by providing genuine consumer choice and introducing new market players.

Of course, we still need a safety net for prices as a transitional measure and to protect consumers from abuse. However, more competition also requires more market players and they will not come onto the market while the price limits are too low and there is too little scope for innovative offers. It will also not help consumers if operators do not have enough money in future to invest in new, faster networks. Ultimately, we do not want to fall behind in Europe. For these reasons, I welcome the fact that we have found a sensible solution and I would like to thank Ms Niebler specifically for her important contribution to this common-sense regulation.

Consumers will notice the benefits of the new Roaming Regulation in their wallets. By 2014, there will be significant falls of up to 45% in the cost of incoming and outgoing calls and, as early as July 2012, consumers will be paying almost 20% less. Particularly in the case of data roaming, there have been no limits to misuse until now, which has, in some cases, resulted in horrendous prices. A cap will be put on these in future. We must continue to work towards completing the internal market and, if possible, finding a solution which means that in future, we do not need roaming charges at all.

Christian Engström (Verts/ALE). – (SV) Mr President, I will be voting in favour of this regulation, but I will do so without any enthusiasm whatsoever, as I see this as an opportunity missed. I have talked about this issue, and we have all agreed with each other and said the right words. We said that data roaming is something that genuinely damages the internal market and harms consumers. We also said that this is something that needs to be regulated, which is something that people who do not like regulation may regret.

We were all in agreement about this, so we all said the right words, but when it came to the figures, they were wrong. From 2014, the ceiling will be 20 cents per megabyte for data roaming. It perhaps does not sound very much per megabyte, but it amounts to EUR 200 per gigabyte. If we compare that with the national prices in any country, we see that consumers are still being robbed. Unfortunately, we will need Roaming IV, as Mr Rübzig said earlier. This is a step in the right direction, but it is too little and it is moving too slowly.

Vicky Ford (ECR). – Mr President, yesterday morning, I received a text message from my UK mobile phone company. It reads, 'Using the web in Europe costs three pounds a meg'. As a result of this new rule, the price will drop to 56 pence. Excessive charging from roaming causes both consumers and operators to lose out. I know many consumers who just switch off their data roaming when they are travelling and do not access any services at all, meaning operators do not sell any services at all.

Whilst many consumers who do travel will like these new caps, it would have been much better if the operators could have come to a voluntary agreement on charges, because there are risks that operators will pass on the costs of capping roaming to domestic customers through higher bills or that this will limit the funds that these operators have for investing in future infrastructure – and boy, do we need those investments to fill holes in our rural coverage and for deeper coverage in our cities.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, it can be seen from the relevant research of independent institutions, as well as from Eurobarometer research, that the market for

mobile data services is not functioning in such a way that competition between providers is generating transparent and fair prices for users of these services. A certain level of regulation is therefore justified, including the setting of maximum prices for the individual types of service provided. Just like my colleagues from the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, I, too, firmly believe that the Commission proposal is too generous to operators, particularly in relation to the maximum retail price of 50 cents per megabyte of data downloaded abroad after 1 July 2014. I therefore support the justified changes to the regulation drafted by the Committee, and I am delighted to join those MEPs who will be voting for the adoption of this improved draft of the regulation.

Romana Jordan (PPE). – (SL) Mr President, today we are discussing legislation that will advance the use of mobile services by European citizens and businesses.

On the one hand, we want to achieve a high level of consumer protection and, on the other, a functioning internal market.

Obviously, setting price caps is not a measure that is appropriate for the market. Consequently, it is no surprise that we had numerous debates on this issue before the first regulation was adopted in 2007.

However, our conclusions were clear: the cross-border services market was not working. For this reason, the first regulation was adopted with price caps on calls, and this has demonstrated good results.

The people of Europe have welcomed this measure and it is also one of the measures that is most widely recognised.

However, reassessments of the mobile phone services market have shown that the market continues to be uncompetitive.

The number of mobile phone users is increasing. Mobile phones are becoming increasingly versatile, with more and more applications. They allow us to use an increasing variety of services.

Every day, millions of citizens in Europe use mobile phones for calls, text messages and browsing the Internet; people use them to arrange their private lives. In addition, mobile phones are becoming increasingly useful in the business world.

This has also led to a continuous increase in the numbers of potential roaming users.

Unfortunately, huge numbers of Europeans continue to switch off their mobile services abroad for fear of high bills. We want to put a stop to this.

The message we are sending out to them today is: in less than two months, the price of cross-border mobile services will fall again thanks to the new regulation.

There is strong support in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy for this regulation and the price reductions, but this is not the only measure we are taking.

Namely, we are also proposing structural measures that will facilitate the proper functioning of the mobile services market to help provide even greater choice for users.

I would sincerely like the market to get off the ground by 2015 and hope that we do not need to intervene any further with drastic measures such as price caps.

Congratulations to our rapporteur.

Teresa Riera Madurell (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, at a time when confidence in the European project is not at its best, I think that this new regulation on roaming represents an important step forward.

The crisis and our response to it are distancing citizens who, in order for confidence in this common project to be restored, need to recognise the benefits that Europe can offer. If we want a Europe without borders, not only must we allow free movement – which some have recently called into question – but we must also facilitate it.

For this reason, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has defended from the start the creation of a single market for mobile communications. Since the start of the review of this regulation, we have defended the idea that roaming tariffs should be brought into line with domestic tariffs, putting an end to the discrimination that exists.

With our position, we have managed, for the first time, to include putting an end to this discrimination as the final objective of the regulation on roaming. In the short term, the price of voice calls, SMS and data while roaming will, progressively, be lowered considerably. Consumers will end up paying 65% less in 2014 for roaming tariffs compared with what they currently pay. Furthermore, they will have more options when choosing between operators thanks to the new structural measures that have been introduced.

However, for the S&D Group, these measures are still merely transitional. We will remain vigilant in order to check that the measures introduced produce the desired effects and introduce more competition into the roaming market. Otherwise, I can tell you that we will continue in the 2016 review to call on the Commission to propose new measures to complete a real single market for mobile communications that gives adequate benefits to consumers.

Ladies and gentlemen, to eliminate roaming is to build Europe; it is to reduce the obstacles that national borders still represent. In short, it is an opportunity that we must not miss in order to continue making progress on this common project that we believe in and that is the European Union. Congratulations to Ms Niebler, Mr Goebbels, Ms Merkies and to all those who have made this agreement possible.

IN THE CHAIR: ROBERTA ANGELILLI

Vice-President

Vladko Todorov Panayotov (ALDE). – (BG) Madam President, international calls made while travelling within the European Union are, on average, five times more expensive than national calls. The current pricing system for roaming services is not sufficiently transparent. Further increases in the prices of roaming services create obstacles preventing the development of a single European market for these services and must therefore be reconsidered. This is why I am in favour of the proposal that provides for a cap for wholesale prices and the price levels that will subsequently be offered to end consumers. The proposal's second part, which aims to reinforce the need for greater transparency in pricing in the market, includes providing consumers with complete and transparent information on roaming tariffs.

I would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Niebler, for her wonderful work on this complex and important directive, which aims to reduce the price of roaming services for European consumers during the current economic crisis. The current situation is incompatible with

the concept of developing a single integrated European services market and the idea of these services being affordable to all of us and of having free competition in this market. This is why I fully support Ms Niebler's work and find it excellent.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR). – Madam President, in this time of austerity measures, my constituents often ask, 'What has the European Union done for me?' Given that the European Union spends most of its time generating red tape, I am pleased when the EU introduces something that makes citizens' lives easier. Bearing in mind the increase in cross-border people movement and the important role telecommunications play within everyday life, this directive makes sense. It has made it less expensive for mobile phone users to make phone calls abroad. The report will cap data-use costs abroad and allow consumers to choose their data provider. I welcome this report and believe the European Union needs more initiatives such as this one. The EU needs to concentrate on making citizens' lives easier. It must support the aims of the single market by promoting free movement of goods, services and people.

Oreste Rossi (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I am bound to say that I am fully in agreement with the speech of Ms Yannakoudakis. Finally, rather than demanding new sacrifices from our citizens, the European Commission has committed itself to cutting charges; in this case, we are talking about mobile phone roaming charges within the European Union.

The cost of international roaming on public communications networks used to represent, and still does today, a genuinely oppressive burden for consumers. This measure increases competition in the sector and reduces the cost of communications when abroad. This will be of help to citizens who are travelling in EU territory and use their national mobile phone number to place calls, surf the Internet and send SMS messages.

As regards the objectives of the 2020 strategy and the Digital Agenda, I believe it is necessary to add to the development of the European communications market, making it more competitive and facilitating market access for new operators. I am in favour of the text because it harmonises the international roaming regulation, protects the consumer and ensures fair treatment.

Patrizia Toia (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, when we speak about good examples for our citizens, when we speak about the internal market and the possibility of creating genuine, concrete opportunities for changes in everyday life through the working of the internal market, we can truly use this example – and we obviously have need of many others – as a fruit of our labours.

It is a good example because, as was said, it has an impact on citizens' real lives, on their daily lives. It also helps businesses to expand their market, not because charges are high and services reduced, but because they can increase their service offering and, in substance, it also helps the economy as a whole. That is why I believe that it is, without doubt, a positive example, a good example.

Yet you will have realised, Commissioner, that there is a widespread desire in this House; in particular, let us recall the speeches of two of my colleagues, Ms Riera Madurell and Mr Goebbels, not to mention many others, who would like this good example to become the best possible example, and would like us to move towards a zero-cost roaming outcome. Such an outcome is possible, and this measure partly anticipates that.

Are we wishing for utopia? No. We are not, because an internal European market implies that domestic and non-domestic tariffs should be similar. There is no longer differentiation if we speak of the single market and, above all, because there is no technical justification for an increase in charges. I remember when, in 2007, we began to discuss voice roaming charges, the first of the trio that we have now tackled. There was a certain incredulity and also certain difficulties; not, however, on the part of the Commission, and here I must give the credit to your predecessor, Ms Reding.

The difficulties were quite wide-ranging. They came from those who said that a true market did not allow for tariffs to be regulated, that there were political prices to pay, that they belonged to an old idea of the left, et cetera, et cetera. There were those who said it would not work and so on, that it would put a brake on the market. In the end, however, we have done it. The interests of citizens and establishing that these were not justifications for increased charges have made it possible. That is how the world moves on, and things are becoming, let us say, ever more possible. That is why I think an even more courageous outcome is achievable.

A concluding remark on why it is not possible to do otherwise. Today, we had a visit from a delegation of Tunisian citizens; I do not know if they are still here. Perhaps one of its many benefits is that this extension to outside the EU will make us understand that the opportunity of using phones without the bugbear of charges will also aid democracy.

Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (PPE). – *(PL)* Madam President, many people in Europe today do not see the point of integration. They have lost faith in a common EU approach and are under the impression that the EU is something for bureaucrats and not for people. However, the new rules on roaming may remove the doubts of some of these people and show them that actually, the EU is able to put measures in place which benefit citizens and consumers. We do not always manage to adopt rules which translate so directly into everyday life, but this one does have direct application. So I would like to compliment Ms Niebler on her report and add my voice to her requests to publicise our achievement – we have reached agreement between all the political groups – and to publicise it in particular among the citizens, because this will help them understand what the European Union does for them.

I want to point out that we mainly talk about financial issues in this Chamber and how they affect household budgets and the money in our pockets. I do think these issues are important, but they are not the only important factor in all of these changes. In Europe, and around the world, people's lifestyles and the ways we keep in touch with each other are simply changing. These contacts are taking place to an ever greater degree using computers, telephones and the Internet. We want ever faster information; we want to be in touch with friends wherever we are; we are travelling more often, too, and it is precisely because our lifestyle is changing that the decision we are going to make today will be so very important for everyone.

This is not just a matter of reducing costs, but is also about the citizens having greater influence and greater control over how much they spend. Providers will have to supply us with information about our accounts and how much we have spent – we will be the ones who decide how much we pay, and this will not be decided for us. We are going to install smart meters in our homes. This regulation is now going to give us access to smartphones.

Oldřich Vlasák (ECR). – (CS) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this roaming regulation can, at first sight, look like a good thing, operating without any problems. For example, tourists who are on holiday no longer need worry about picking up a phone.

The problem, however, is that setting price ceilings, as an administrative intervention in the market, has its negative consequences elsewhere in the telecoms market. The aim should be to have greater competition on the roaming market. This has not happened, however, as we see from the fact that prices of regulated services have remained just below the level of the price ceilings set by the regulation currently in force. In my own country, the regulation has influenced the prices of other telecoms products, with all three operators increasing prices for SMS services, for example, in some cases several times over.

I therefore firmly believe that price regulation based on price ceilings does not fulfil its primary function, and I would like to warn against an excessively ambitious approach to regulation in this sector. We will encourage competition more by removing obstacles to market access for new players, and not by tying up the telecoms market until 2022.

Mara Bizzotto (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, there are over 120 million broadband users in Europe, and at least 70 million people use their own mobile phone to connect to the Internet, do work, study or simply obtain information. Thanks to this regulation, the European Union has finally decided to intervene in favour of these consumers and reduce the cost of international telephone traffic, be it by way of voice, data or SMS messaging. This is a positive decision because the price reduction programme will lead to an average drop in charges of 35% over the next three years.

That is not enough, however. At a difficult time like this, for both the economy and jobs, communications, new technologies and innovation are a prime asset that Europe must defend more courageously. Every European citizen must be able to move freely between Member States using the telecommunications tariffs set by his or her own national operator. Those who travel around Europe have had enough of being ripped off and enormous bills.

If we really want to give a concrete response to citizens' concerns, let us create a sort of telecommunications Schengen area, where they will no longer be charged at rates that differ from country to country within the area.

Horst Schnellhardt (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, a few years ago, I made a cross-border call on my mobile phone in Europe and the bill for my 15-minute conversation was EUR 123. Thanks to the European Parliament, we have now put an end to this kind of racket.

I admit that I was rather unhappy about the Roaming I Regulation, because price regulation is not something that goes with a market economy. However, we had no choice. Normally the market regulates prices by means of supply and demand as part of the competitive process. However, if there is no competition on the telecommunications market, we need to step in and introduce regulations.

Just like surfing the Internet, making phone calls is as much a part of our everyday life as eating and drinking. We have the internal market, but citizens who travel in Europe are ripped off when it comes to roaming charges. We must put a stop to this. Against this background and given this situation, we have made the right response. The previous decisions have largely concerned price regulation. The rules that we will be adopting tomorrow will settle precisely this problem. My fellow Member has said that there is a lack of competition. With the regulation that is in front of us now, we will be creating

competition in Europe, not just in one country, but in the internal market. This sends out a very positive signal. If the citizens of Europe take the opportunity that is open to them now, within five to six years, we will no longer have to talk about roaming in Europe.

We have also looked to the future. We have included all the options for data transmission in this regulation and we have taken a realistic approach. We should give our sincere thanks to the rapporteurs and to everyone involved. This is an excellent proposal which is in the interests of the citizens of Europe.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) Madam President, I would like to congratulate Ms Niebler and the shadow rapporteurs for the report which they have drafted and for the negotiations they conducted with the Council with the mandate from the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy.

The aim of the regulations adopted in 2007 and 2009 and, in particular, of the current one is to protect consumers and make roaming service providers flexible by introducing roaming Euro-call, Euro-SMS and Euro-data charges. However, an internal telecommunications market cannot be said to exist while there are still significant differences between domestic and roaming service prices. Objective 101 of the Digital Agenda is to achieve convergence between domestic and roaming charges by 2015. This is why the ultimate aim should be to eliminate the difference between domestic and roaming charges, thereby establishing an internal market for mobile communication services.

Through the amendments tabled, I advocated that users living in border regions should not receive unnecessarily high bills due to inadvertent roaming. Roaming service providers should take reasonable steps to protect customers against incurring roaming charges while they are in their own Member State. Likewise, national regulatory authorities should take appropriate measures to mitigate the relevant problems. Selling regulated roaming services separately from domestic mobile communications services is a necessary intermediate step for increasing competition and lowering roaming service charges for customers in order to achieve an internal market for mobile communication services and, ultimately, for ending the differentiation between domestic and roaming charges.

We call for the regulation to be reviewed in 2016 to ensure appropriate protection for consumers, if convergence between domestic and roaming charges has not been achieved by then.

James Nicholson (ECR). – Madam President, excessive roaming charges are something which both individuals and businesses have had to bear. We often talk about removing barriers in Europe, and I therefore welcome the Commission's ongoing attempts to address this issue. The goal of fully eliminating roaming charges in the EU before 2015 is ambitious, but is certainly one which I can support.

In my constituency, citizens frequently travel across the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and they do not have to cross the border to have the extra charges imposed on them. This is a thing that makes many of the constituents on both sides of the border very angry, and one can understand why it does. The legislation will hopefully promote more competition in the roaming market, allowing consumers the choice of mobile operators, with roaming as a positive development, particularly in these challenging economic times, for businesses, in particular, to find a better deal, reduce their costs and seek new opportunities in other Member States.

Hermann Winkler (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we have achieved a good result. I would like to thank Ms Niebler and the members on the committees. The new roaming charges will prevent consumers from being exploited and finally bring an end to unfair pricing practices. I hope that in the summer holidays, which some of us may spend in Greece, and hopefully we will still be able to travel to Greece by then, we will notice the difference.

However, I would also like to mention another point that is particularly important to me and to the region I come from, which has borders with Poland and the Czech Republic. Citizens who live in border regions must no longer have to pay especially high costs. They are often completely unaware of the fact that they are inadvertently using expensive foreign networks. They cannot do anything about this and they do not receive any warnings. We often talk about a Europe without borders, but when we use mobile phones near a border, we have to pay a penalty. We want to change this situation. The service providers must ensure that customers no longer have to pay the high charges which are currently being imposed on them.

Nevertheless, I would like to warn everyone against getting too excited, even if the signals which we are sending out today are positive. Ms Kroes, you have said that Mr Schuman would have been proud of us today. It seems to me to be rather an exaggeration to suggest that he might have been proud about this issue when we are in the midst of the most serious crisis ever to hit the European Union. I also believe that he would not have been quite as proud of the draft produced by the Commission. My thanks go to the members in the committees who, fortunately, were able to make some changes to it. This will help the citizens of Europe who are also the end consumers. However, we must also admit that the costs which we impose on the citizens of Europe as a result of our other directives and regulations add up to a much larger amount than the money which we are now saving them. We need to work on improving this situation in future. However, this does represent a step in the right direction. I believe that we can all look forward to the summer holidays and to travelling in border regions.

Kathleen Van Brempt (S&D). – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, one of the headlines in the Belgian press yesterday said that young people send an average of 71 text messages a day. That is a lot, even for a frequent text messenger like me, but this tells you something about the kind of world young people live in. An extraordinary amount of text messages are being sent, but what you also see is a whole lot of people downloading data and reading newspapers on the train. This has simply become our way of life. We do not just make phone calls, we also send text messages and we use an awful lot of data services.

With that in mind, it is strange to see that, up till now, we have not found a solution to the associated high prices we pay, the high domestic prices – certainly in my country. Secondly, it is totally unacceptable from a European perspective that we have found no solution to roaming rates. It is bizarre – as Mr Goebbels has very clearly pointed out – because there is no good reason why mobile phone services between Antwerp and Paris should be so much more expensive than those between Marseille and Paris. We all know that it has to do with a number of large corporate groups who earn outrageous profits as a result. We are taking a step forward and it actually makes no difference to me, as a modern Social Democrat, if the cat is grey or black as long as she catches mice, and as long as the problem is resolved.

We want competition. We want an open market. If we fail to accomplish those two objectives, then we will set price caps. We are doing that today and this will at least ensure that prices go down by the summer and that they reach more normal levels.

In the long run, this Parliament, and certainly this group in Parliament, wants to see a complete abolition of roaming rates. We have agreed to make this a reality by 2016 and you and your team, in particular – because this will stretch into the next parliamentary term – will be held to account on that score. National rates, too, must be drastically reduced, because downloading data, making calls and text messaging is a right and our consumers should not have to pay too much for it.

Julie Girling (ECR). – Madam President, I very much thank the rapporteur. I think this is an excellent report. I am instinctively politically opposed to the setting of caps on prices (I am a traditional free marketeer), but I do recognise that, when we are in a position where that dogma will simply not suffice, we need to bring in the democratic will.

As information on everything from bus timetables to important information on over-the-counter medicines more and more relies on you being able to point a mobile at it for the information rather than it being written, that is good for the environment – we are all for that – but if I am in a different country, that should not be costing me a lot of money. It is my access to information, which I think is fast becoming seen as a right of citizens.

I would like to set a challenge to the industry that we should not be here yet again in a couple of years' time for another reiteration of this. They should get their act together, sort themselves out and accept that the party is over and it is time they provided citizens with a service at a reasonable price.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – (GA) Madam President, on this great Europe Day, I am happy to be a part of this process and I particularly commend Angelika Niebler for her good work. Undoubtedly, we have achieved a good result for our citizens and it shows the truth of the proverb: there is no strength without unity.

Our esteemed President, Mr Schulz, spoke today about Robert Schuman and quoted him talking about the need for solidarity in deeds. Well, here we have solidarity in deeds that have been official for our citizens. Like others, I, too, received a text from my mobile operator when I landed in Brussels, telling me to enjoy roaming. For better value roaming, I was getting voice calls at 42 cents a minute to make, 13 cents a minute to receive, text messages 13 cents a minute to send and various prices for Internet and data roaming. I will enjoy roaming far better (because I will be getting better value as a result of the European Union) from 1 July: the 42 cents will become 29 cents, down to 24 cents, to 19 cents in 2014. The 13 cents for calls received will go down to 8 cents in July, then to 7 cents in 2014 and 5 cents subsequently.

An SMS will cost 9 cents, 8 cents and 6 cents, and data roaming will go from 70 cents to 35 cents and down to 20 cents. So there will certainly be better value there for consumers. In addition, particularly for those who travel abroad regularly, the local break-out will be of great benefit. Especially if we can help create competition in the market by allowing mobile operators without their own network to use the network of other operators, that should help to make these not just maximum and minimum prices but price caps, where the real price will be far lower than this.

Pavel Poc (S&D). – (CS) Madam President, thanks to the established price ceilings, Europeans will again enjoy lower telephone call charges this summer, and from 2014, customers will finally be able to choose between mobile roaming services, while from 2016, there will perhaps be no difference between national and international calls. Virtual operators will now have the right to access the networks of other operators under regulated wholesale prices. Despite all of the fairytales about a market environment, operators in my own country have so far had no interest in providing their networks to virtual operators, and nor have they provided them, because of their market dominance.

It is hard for us to talk about a single telecoms market when we have varying tariffs within the EU and completely nonsensical, inexcusably high prices that are not due to market competition, and not due to technical reasons, but due to the perverse pricing policy of the multinational cartels, which is based on the existence of administrative barriers and on nothing else.

Both the customer and the market are now slowly shaking off the yoke of cartel agreements and artificial barriers. It is worth noting that a genuine market, a market benefiting the customer and a competitive environment benefiting the customer, must be created through regulation in this case. The time is approaching when Europeans will be able to call their nearest and dearest in the EU without worry, and use the maps and navigation aids on their tablets or use emails while on holiday.

I am truly grateful for this signal that our policy can – at least sometimes – defend the interests of people ahead of the interests of corporations. I would also like, in this place, to thank Ms Niebler and particularly the shadow rapporteur, Mr Goebbels, for an excellent – a really excellent – piece of work.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I do not think there could be a better day on which to hold this debate. Today is Europe Day, when we celebrate the idea of uniting 27 countries to date, creating a single market, a common currency for many of our Member States, ongoing cultural and educational exchange; an exchange, in short, of feelings of greater togetherness and closeness. What medium unites us more these days than that of communication?

A single internal telecommunications market cannot, in fact, be said to exist without telecommunications and if significant differences remain between domestic and roaming prices. Therefore, the ultimate aim we have set ourselves is also the hypothetical one of being able to eliminate the difference between domestic charges and roaming charges, thus establishing an internal market for mobile communications services. It is one of the aims that we must set ourselves.

In this way, competition will improve, and people will be protected. It is an economic saving, because high roaming charges always constitute an impediment to the Union's efforts to develop into a knowledge-based economy and to the realisation of an internal market of 500 million consumers.

That is not all. The creation of a European social, educational, cultural and entrepreneurial area, based on the mobility of individuals and digital data, should facilitate communication between people in order to attain our aim, which is to build a real 'Europe for Citizens'.

For these reasons, I thank the rapporteur, Ms Niebler, for her skill and her great capabilities at mediation, but most of all, for having attained the aims that have been achieved, given the importance of this issue. Obviously, I also thank all the shadow rapporteurs.

Ioan Enciu (S&D). – Madam President, the common market and freedom of movement are some of the cornerstones of the construction of Europe and yet the citizens of Europe have to pay an extra fee for communicating with each other when travelling within the EU, which I believe is unacceptable.

The Roaming Regulation in this negotiated form achieves some quite positive results in terms of reduced price caps for voice calls, data services and SMS. However, the way to a European single market for mobile communication, which has to be our ultimate goal, is still far from being reached. In my view, the extra costs for roaming are not justified by any technical reasons. They create fake and unjust commercial borders; they represent an actual impediment to the free competition among network operators that would lead to better services, lower prices, more consumption and more growth in the European Union.

The biggest improvement that this new regulation will bring in terms of benefits for the European citizen is the significant cut in the price of data services. This was a top priority for the S&D Group and I am pleased that such an important point has been agreed upon. However, I am quite disappointed that not enough attention has been given to the net neutrality issue as I believe that customers should be allowed to access any Internet services from their phones without discrimination.

The overall outcome of the negotiations with the Council is satisfactory. However, I would like to remind you that this Parliament should push for the creation of a single market for telecommunications and that the EU must become a roaming free area.

Alojz Peterle (PPE). – (SL) Madam President, this directive is a gift to the people of Europe on this Europe Day.

They will feel the difference in their pockets, which is the best indicator of support felt for the European Union, because they will be making phone calls, sending text messages and transferring data much more cheaply than before.

I congratulate the rapporteur, Angelika Niebler, Commissioner Kroes and the Council for what they have achieved and the persistence they have shown in pursuing this ambition, which began in the previous term, and which has proved that the European Union is working.

Seven years ago, I complained to Commissioner Reding about unreasonably high roaming charges and I proposed that the Commission take some action for the benefit of mobile phone users.

This was the beginning of a journey that led us to a directive as a result of which, a few years later, we were able to gradually reduce roaming charges despite strong resistance from mobile network operators.

At the time, the pragmatists were saying that we would fail.

This directive does not simply mean showing consideration for mobile phone users and, in particular, their holiday budgets; it is also a contribution towards greater competitiveness.

It simply means more Europe.

I am even confident that we can achieve something similar in certain other fields.

Thank you very much. I donate my thirty remaining seconds to the next speaker.

Marita Ulvskog (S&D). – (SV) Madam President, today's vote or today's decision will mean that we will dramatically reduce the cost of mobile Internet access, calls and text messages. This will be noticed in the wallets of consumers and travellers, and they will notice it as soon as July this year, when the costs will be reduced by 35%. Next year, the costs will be reduced by a few more percentage points and, by 2014, 65% of the costs will have been eradicated. The price of data will also be adequately reduced, and all of this is clear evidence that politics can play a role: the market cannot decide; the market must not be able to set exorbitant prices.

In a borderless internal market, however, there is actually no reason for it to be more expensive to make calls between countries than to call someone in the same country. We now have a guarantee that the Commission will come back with a strong legislative proposal for a fully integrated telecommunications market if insufficient improvements have been made by 2016. We are therefore prepared to go further to ensure that people do not pay more than they should actually need to.

Regina Bastos (PPE). – (PT) Madam President, I would like to begin by congratulating Ms Niebler on this excellent work, and by highlighting the coincidence that, on the day we are celebrating Europe Day, we are debating, and tomorrow will adopt, measures that address the legitimate concerns of our citizens.

What this regulation is about is the imposition of limits on mobile phone roaming tariffs charged to European consumers, and its main objective is to put an end to roaming charges in Europe as of 2016. Our citizens will benefit from a sharp fall in the prices of voice calls, texts and data. Whereas today, there are operators that charge EUR 3 per megabyte, as of July, the maximum price they will be able to charge will be EUR 0.70 per megabyte, and this will fall to EUR 0.20 in 2014. As for calls received, the maximum price that can be charged will be EUR 0.08 this year and EUR 0.05 in 2014. In July 2012, a family with two mobile phone users will, as the Commissioner has said, save EUR 200 on their bill.

The second benefit is better quality of information for consumers. From this summer onwards, operators will be required to inform consumers of the prices charged when they travel outside the European Union. Until now, this requirement only applied within Europe.

The third advantage is the possibility of more operators entering the market. This means more competition, which will stimulate better services and better prices.

Finally, in the near future, consumers may, if they so wish, have two contracts: one for domestic services and another for services abroad, whilst retaining the same mobile phone number and having only one bill. Consumers – our citizens – will also be entitled to enter into a contract with any European operator that offers a better price. This report is a perfect example of a Europe of the citizens, a Europe of freedom of movement and freedom of establishment.

Francesco De Angelis (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, on Europe Day, this regulation is a good example. The harmonisation of roaming charges is fundamental for the process of completing the internal market of the European Union. There is always much talk of a single market and the removal of tariff barriers, and yet barriers between European countries in the telecommunications sector as regards roaming charges seemed insuperable. Now this is no longer the case, and it will no longer be the case up to and beyond July 2014.

Tariff reductions are finally real and tangible, and this is good news for citizens throughout Europe. The agreement binds all operators in the 27 Member States, without exception, to reducing roaming charges for telephone calls, messages and Internet connections, starting no later than 1 July next. This is an important and significant saving, at a time of crisis and grave economic difficulty for so many families. What is more, I am pleased with the measure that will enable users who are abroad to opt for the services of the most convenient operator as from 2014.

No more chains, therefore. However, all this is not enough; it is only a first step. The real objective is 'zero' roaming; the real objective is the total abolition of roaming charges. Building a fair and competitive market also depends on Europe's capacity to safeguard the needs and rights of its citizens.

Hubert Pirker (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Europe frequently sends out very positive messages. This was the case with the Schengen Agreement, which brought us freedom of movement, and with the introduction of the common currency, the euro. The particularly positive message today is that in future, the charges for sending texts and using data roaming will be much lower and more affordable and will have an upper limit.

Thanks to the excellent negotiating skills of Ms Niebler, from 1 July onwards, consumers will no longer be exploited. Communication using smartphones and tablets will become much cheaper and more customer-friendly. As is normally the case with diallers, consumers will, in future, be able to select the foreign provider that they want to use. Consumer protection measures will also be introduced.

I think it is particularly good that we can send out this positive message today on 9 May, which is Europe Day, and I am pleased that consumers will no longer be receiving annoyingly high phone bills after their summer holiday abroad this year.

I am also pleased for the residents of border regions who will, in future, be able to use their smartphones and tablets without the fear of receiving unexpectedly large bills when they cross the border briefly while going about their normal business.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, both the European Commission's proposal and the report tabled by Ms Niebler are moving in the right direction. However, measures to bring down roaming charges are still insufficient. Instead of setting maximum price limits for roaming services, we should establish a deadline for ending the existence of roaming tariffs within the European Union. Only this solution will guarantee that people have full freedom of movement within the Union while not exposing them to the costs currently associated with using all these modern means of communication.

Global telecommunications companies which currently provide services in the EU are today already able to operate across borders throughout all the Member States without incurring additional costs. The operation of roaming impacts directly on the average European. It directly creates artificial barriers to communication as well as barriers to travel, including tourist travel, business trips, educational trips and youth exchanges. It is in Europe's interest to end roaming as soon as possible.

Danuta Jazłowiecka (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, the compromise achieved in the regulation, which aims to bring down the prices of telecommunications services, is a very good measure and is designed to be of direct benefit to the people of Europe. The Roaming III Regulation is not so much a consequence of the constantly developing single market in the European Union as of the activities of the operators, who have been trying

to maximise their profits at the cost of their clients. The activities of the mobile phone operators are another example which highlights the fact that free market principles do not always fulfil the hopes placed in them. It is increasingly evident that in certain circumstances, it is necessary for the regulator to intervene and force real competition to develop. No one, surely, is in any doubt that in this case, this is happening with clear social and economic benefits, because when individuals and firms have to pay lower bills, it helps stimulate the economy.

Naturally, I am under no illusions that the operators will accept these proposals without resistance, but the example of the success of the previous regulation on reducing roaming costs is, I think, a conclusive argument in favour of this change. Furthermore, in the last few weeks, there have been huge transformations in this market segment, and we are dealing with a *de facto* oligopoly which is allowing a small number of pan-European brands to control the market. Therefore, in this situation, it is not just difficult to see real competition, but it is also hard to believe in the existence of barriers preventing cooperation between individual national operators that are part of the same corporation.

The lifestyle of the citizens of the world and of Europe is changing, and increasingly often we are having to work away from home for shorter or longer periods. All means of communication which make it easier to maintain contact with our family and friends should be easily and cheaply available. All means of communication which make it easier for employers and employees to stay in touch with each other should be widely available. One of these tools is cheap roaming. I do hope, however, that today's debate and the Roaming III Regulation will not be the end of this work, but will just be another step which takes us closer to the goal of bringing down the costs of using telecommunications services as far as possible. Ms Niebler, I would like to compliment you and the shadow rapporteurs on the professional attitude you demonstrated during work on this report.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE). – Madam President, I would like to thank the rapporteur for the work she has done and all her efforts. I think one of the important achievements in this report is the fact that now, from 2014, we will be able to have what is called 'local break-out', meaning that we have a real structural reform changing the logic of the telecom markets in regard to Internet surfing and all those things that are more and more important today.

For me, it is still a paradox that in this most modern and dynamic market, the telecoms market, we still have 27 different national markets in the European Union where, in reality, we should have just one market able to form the basis for our global leadership.

We can discuss different price caps and we can discuss different ways of regulating how things are today, but the important thing is that, if we are opening the door for one European market in the European Union, with this local break-out, it will be possible for all of us to connect to the Internet when we are abroad in the European Union without, so to speak, phoning back home and paying these very expensive costs. We will be able to do this as we do with wi-fi.

So when the Danish Presidency or other presidencies come here to Brussels or Strasbourg, they will not have to get connected. We are the home country. They will be able to use the best possible offer in the country where we are and that will be the case not just for the presidencies, it will be the case for all citizens in Europe.

I think this achievement will also mean that we will be able to use all the opportunities that we are opening up today on the Internet for all mobile data traffic and that this will lay the ground for a more competitive Europe, but also a more connected Europe.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) Madam President, allow me to begin by commending the job done by Ms Niebler. In actual fact, we should have held this debate much earlier. However, I am pleased that we are having it right now. The last price cap for roaming services was set in July 2009, and there have been significant advances in technology since then. In spite of this, no attention has been paid to roaming at all, and we continue to pay the same prices even in 2012. Quite frankly, it is often much cheaper to take a taxi to get to your destination than to search for it on the Internet on an ordinary map, whether it be a hotel or other destination. Data transfer is playing an ever-increasing role in communication, in both business and private life. This is why I believe that this price limit needed to be set earlier, but I am pleased that it is happening now. I believe that these measures adopted at EU level will enable us to standardise communications systems across the EU in the 27 Member States.

Petri Sarvamaa (PPE). – Madam President, congratulations to my dear colleague Niebler. There is no better day in the calendar than Schuman Day to express the joy that I feel about this agreement on roaming on mobile networks. This is what the European Union is all about. We brought the whole of Europe under the same ceiling; we gave the people of Europe something concrete that we all can feel in our pockets and we – this Parliament – played a decisive role in bringing prices down for everyone in Europe who uses their mobile phone when travelling inside the Union. This is a prime example of how this Parliament serves the citizens of the European Union and I am proud of it.

Phil Prendergast (S&D). – Madam President, the deal struck to impose stricter price caps and roaming costs for calls, texts and mobile Internet access represents welcome progress for European consumers, but abolition is the way forward. Roaming costs for mobile phone services have no place in the internal market and I remain committed to work towards their abolition.

The EU is forced to impose cheaper prices for roaming services as companies keep pricing their services near the level of mandatory price ceilings. This demonstrates that competition is not working; roaming no longer makes any economic sense and consumers are paying up to four times the wholesale market prices charged by mobile operators to other mobile operators. We need to make the single market work so that our citizens and businesses can have more opportunities to recover and prosper in Europe.

Ana Miranda (Verts/ALE). – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, Ms Niebler, where I come from, on the border between Galicia and Portugal, there are many constituents who call every day to say that they are affected by the problem of roaming charges, as the network operators even change without one changing country. These are consumers and workers who cross internal European borders and receive exorbitant bills.

Today, on Europe Day, we are talking about the communications border and price inequality. We are talking about an advance being made in the regulation of phone and data roaming. This regulation is therefore welcome, Commissioner. I welcome the fact that it attacks the lack of competition and the monopolies, that it gives consumers more choice, and also that it tackles price disparities. This, however, is not enough. We need to

facilitate fairer prices and to communicate without borders, and so alleviating this problem and going for zero roaming charges is also a way of integrating Europe.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Neelie Kroes, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Madam President, I am in a good mood, so to speak, because of the positive collaboration and constructive work by the Parliament, the Council and hopefully also, in your experience, the Commission. We are able to add another strong example to the list of why Europe counts and why Europe is so important. We badly need examples to show the citizens in Europe that it is not only a philosophy and a case of ‘this is what we believe’, but that we can also deliver on the list of what can be done.

I was very much inspired by the intervention by Mr Hökmark. He indeed painted it in a broader sense than what is at stake today. Today is an historic day, talking about our proposal, which, as mentioned, has been put on the table under the leadership of Angelika. All in all, it is just one step on a long road where we have to deliver: we have talked about a Digital Agenda; we have to deliver on quite a number of issues. This experience with you, the Parliament, and with the Council, is inspiring me to go on and to prove to the outside world that Europe is worthwhile, that Europe makes sense, and that it is a single digital market where borders should not count, but where the united population is taking advantage of what is at stake, in the spirit of the founders of Europe.

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (DA) Madam President, Commissioner, honourable Members, first and foremost, I would like to thank Parliament for an extremely good debate, in which it has been absolutely clear that we will hopefully see a resolution tomorrow that will secure a better internal market, greater competitiveness and greater consumer protection, and that will help the EU to be better equipped to compete at international level.

As my good friend, Jens Rohde, said, irrespective of what your political convictions may be, we have seen that the telecommunications companies have not been capable of setting reasonable prices themselves. It has therefore been necessary for the Commission, Parliament and also the Council to take decisive and important decisions. This does not mean that making calls across borders will suddenly become cheap, but it does mean that it will be considerably cheaper than it was previously. This is good news for companies, which are required to create jobs and growth, but it is indeed also good news for all those who travel around in Europe, whether alone or with their families. I believe it is the experience of most people who have travelled with children or grandchildren that, when the bill comes, a few weeks later, the envelope contains a very unpleasant surprise.

It will now be safer, more secure and more consumer-friendly to use mobile telephony to make calls, send text messages and receive data. Therefore, the resolution that the European Parliament will adopt tomorrow is a very good example of the fact that, even in a crisis situation, we have a Europe that is aware that it has to take sound decisions for the sake of growth and consumer safety. Tomorrow will therefore be a very good day for the EU, and particularly for the 500 million citizens of the Union, and on behalf of the Council, I would like once again to thank Parliament and the Commission for their excellent cooperation, with the product of which I think we can all be satisfied.

IN THE CHAIR: JACEK PROTASIEWICZ*Vice-President*

Angelika Niebler, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Wammen, Ms Kroes, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to thank everyone very much for the many appreciative comments. I am very pleased, because I have never before received so much praise in Parliament. However, I would also like to express my gratitude and, most importantly, to return the thanks of all the Members of this Parliament who have given me such strong support during the debates. Of course, I would like to thank the Danish Presidency and the Commission once again for their excellent cooperation.

It is true that we have a European internal market and a Single Euro Payments Area. I believe that our objective must be to establish a single European communication area, as many Members have already said in the course of this debate. Creating a roaming-free area in Europe must be our ultimate goal. I very much hope that we will be able to achieve this in the near future.

I also hope, Ms Kroes, that we do not need a Roaming IV Regulation, as Mr Rübig has suggested. I hope, as a result of the structural measures and the competition which will now develop, that one provider will make a bold move and stop charging for roaming altogether. I hope that this will happen before the revision and before you submit a report here in 2016. I hope that the competitive market functions in such a way that the subject of roaming finally becomes a thing of the past.

I would like to pass on my warm thanks. I am looking forward to the vote tomorrow and I hope that Parliament will give the report substantial support.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 10 May 2012.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) Regulating roaming charges is one of the key factors in completing the single electronic communications market. This proposal for a regulation will help make life easier for mobile phone users with regard to prices, availability of options, quality and security. At the moment, neither European consumers nor the European economy are benefiting from excessive roaming charges and the low level of use of roaming services in the EU due to the high charges. This is why I think that introducing for the first time a cap on retail prices for mobile data services is a welcome step. Moreover, the new regulation will extend the obligation on mobile telecommunication companies to advise their own users when their roaming bill exceeds EUR 50, as well as inform them about the price of the roaming services being offered.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) In the past, the Commission has repeatedly called on operators to reduce unreasonably high charges for roaming. The calls brought no response, however, and the EU has decided to intervene in order to protect consumers through price regulation. In July 2011, the Commission proposed the third in the series of regulations on roaming. The aim of the reform is to reduce prices for international calls to the level of domestic tariffs. Healthy competition has not yet developed, and customers are still paying prices that are unreasonably high. The report on the development of the market for roaming services states that current charges are not sufficiently flexible to prevent users paying unreasonably high prices. In my opinion, the

proposed reduction in charges is a step in the right direction. If we want genuinely to fulfil the vision of a single internal market, we must address the problems relating to roaming. Such an approach accords with the Europe 2020 strategy, the Single Market Act and the Digital Agenda for Europe. Electronic communications must be universally accessible and available at reasonable prices. For this reason, I support all measures aimed at eliminating unreasonable prices for roaming calls. There is no technical justification for the retention of roaming. Roaming tariffs should be completely scrapped. We must ensure that consumers are not ripped off by the large mobile operators. Their profits in this area are unreasonably high.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), *in writing.* – (FI) These days, we are not accustomed to expecting good news from the European Union. In celebration of Europe Day yesterday, however, one piece of good EU news has emerged: it will once again be cheaper to use mobile phones abroad next summer. A sense of proportion is to be brought to the shock that has left some people reeling upon receipt of their bill, when they discover they have faced inordinately high charges of several thousand euro, when roaming settings have been left on and random roaming has got very expensive. I know, because I was responsible for the regulation on roaming within the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection.

The new regulation is to enter into force in July, and will cut prices to at least half their current levels by 2014. It will set price caps for roaming calls, for text messages and, for the first time, for data traffic also. It will also impose an obligation on telephone operators to inform consumers by text message when they are approaching the price ceilings which they themselves have set when they are outside the EU. In this way, we can also prevent shock charges outside the Union, where reasonable price ceilings cannot be regulated by law. In addition, the regulation proposes structural changes to promote much needed competition in the roaming market. The EU's idea was the principle of the four freedoms: the purpose is to remove barriers to the free movement of workers, goods, services and capital. Now, those barriers have been removed once again. In the age of smartphones, it has been frustrating that their intelligence has had to be shut off just when it was needed most, while on the move under new circumstances in foreign countries. Soon, we will even be consulting maps and timetables and checking the best tips, wherever we happen to be.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) Reducing charges for using public mobile communications networks within the Union is another step in the process of harmonising the market, and will bring Europe closer to the ideal, where the consumer has full and easy access to mobile telephone services throughout the EU at a reasonable price. The regulation advances an innovative approach, because it proposes not only limits on prices, but also a structural change in the market. In addition, it will increase competitiveness between operators, stimulate the internal market and contribute to the mobility of citizens and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Harmonisation of roaming charges is very good for the people who live in the EU, because many Europeans who live or travel outside their own country incur high costs when they make phone calls to their families. Starting in July, we will pay EUR 0.29, or a little over PLN 1.30, for making a call from a mobile phone while in another country, and the price of an incoming call shall not exceed EUR 0.08. Mobile phones should be mobile, but many people who live in the EU turn off their mobile phones, smartphones and tablets while travelling in the Union because they are afraid of the high costs of data roaming. Competition continues to be weak, and the operators are still applying excessive margins, particularly in the case of data roaming. Customers are currently having to pay several

euro per megabyte, but now, as the summer holidays begin, they will be paying no more than EUR 0.70. Furthermore, they will be able themselves to choose the foreign network operator whose services they use.

Vladimír Maňka (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) High roaming charges are a considerable obstacle for citizens studying or working in another country. The current regulation on roaming ends on 30 June 2012. The regulation has substantially reduced prices for roaming calls and text messages.

Regulatory intervention in the market for mobile roaming services should therefore be extended beyond 30 June 2012. The objective is to secure a significant reduction in charges, and for there to be no difference between domestic and roaming charges by 2015.

If, from 1 July 2014, customers are able to sign agreements on the provision of mobile roaming services that are separate from the provision of domestic mobile services, we will be supporting competition on the market for roaming services and it will mark a step in the right direction. Retail price regulation is to continue until 1 June 2016, but may be extended until the structural measures it lays down become fully effective.

The new regulation should continue to regulate roaming charges for calls and text messages, while introducing a substantial new element: a euro-data tariff for retail data roaming services. We need new structural measures to boost competition, with price caps maintained as a temporary 'safety net' for consumers to cover the period until competition drives prices down by itself.

Iosif Matula (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I think that the agreement on reducing roaming charges in the EU is ideal in light of the structural problems caused by roaming services. In fact, from 1 July 2012, charges for calls made in an EU Member State other than the caller's home country cannot exceed 29 cents per minute, while those for answered calls should not be higher than eight cents per minute.

To curb the impact of high roaming service charges, the situation needs to shift from the monopoly held by mobile phone operators to sustainable competition intended to encourage investment and the creation of new jobs. This will allow users to choose the mobile phone operator they want for the time they are going to be abroad.

I should point out the situation of customers living in border regions who receive unnecessarily high bills due to inadvertent roaming. On this point, roaming and mobile phone service providers must warn users immediately when their phone is subject to roaming. The freedom of movement in the European Union must be backed up by the freedom to communicate at affordable prices throughout Europe.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – One of the basic unjustified sources of profit is the likely collusion of EU mobile network operators aimed at getting extra profit, since there is heavy competition between operators on the internal markets of EU Member States. In order to eliminate the fraud and cheating, it is necessary to draft very strict legislation with the highest possible fines, going up to the withdrawal of the mobile operator's licence, because high roaming tariffs influence the growth of the economy in Europe. An analysis of all roaming contracts needs to be made in the very near future and the system of a wrong attitude towards consumers demolished.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Given that contracts offering an unlimited amount of data are available for EUR 15 per month, a contract with a limited amount of data which

causes users to incur costs amounting to hundreds of euro when they exceed their free allowance seems to me to be highly questionable. The current charges for roaming services are also unrealistic. It is important that consumers are protected against the unclear pricing policies of mobile communications operators, for example, by means of the roaming initiative. Unfortunately, it is still easy to run up huge and unexpected bills on a mobile phone. Many operators still do not allow added value and data services to be blocked automatically or monthly cost limits to be agreed on, nor do they provide notification when young people exceed their free allowances. This represents a problem and not only because mobile phone users are increasingly becoming younger and, therefore, more inexperienced. Owners of mobile phones and smartphones can find themselves inadvertently and without their agreement taking out a mobile subscription as a result of supposedly free downloads or after clicking by mistake on the advertising that forms part of an app. The EU must ensure that consumer rights are respected by the mobile communications industry. For example, we need to reinforce the right to cancel a contract and guarantee that blocks can be applied to bills. Not least, users of smartphones and mobiles must have the right to agree to or reject a subscription that they have signed up to within a short period of time without incurring additional costs.

Olga Sehnalová (S&D), *in writing*. – (CS) Many European citizens travelling abroad on holiday nervously switch off their mobile phones even before leaving their home country. They are worried that they might – even accidentally – activate a roaming call which would at best use up all of their prepaid credit and at worst push up their fixed tariff to dizzying heights. I therefore welcome the fact that agreement has been reached on a further gradual reduction in roaming prices up to 2014. Although the resulting price limits will be reduced by tens of per cent, it is still only a partial success. Our aim must be a single European market in relation to prices for calls and the transmission of data, with no difference between domestic and roaming tariffs. This is a symbol of how far we still are from the declared aim of a single market free of artificial barriers.

Marc Tarabella (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) For too long, real competition, which is profitable to consumers, has been conspicuously silent! Parliament is coming to the rescue from 1 July. Firstly, this reduction in roaming charges is an excellent thing for citizens, but that is not all. European consumers will be able to buy specific roaming tariffs for communication or mobile Internet separately, possibly from another operator. Citizens who go on holiday in Europe will no longer have to break the bank paying their telephone bill when they return. It is also quite a bonus for all the citizens living in border regions. Furthermore, for optimal comfort, consumers will be able to enjoy this service without having to change their number. Lastly, in order to avoid nasty surprises for consumers, operators will be obliged to send a message to the user with all the costs of the country they are arriving in, no matter where they are in the world. If we notice that the operators are not playing the game in this area and in others, we will start all over again in 2014-2015.

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) Current roaming charges bear little relation to what the mobile networks pay for providing them. We are not talking here about the profits being made by these firms, but about the downright fleecing of European consumers, who are still having to pay too much for telephone calls and text messages, not to mention data transmission, as soon as they leave their own country. Today, our mobile phone bill is something which is guaranteed to spoil every foreign holiday. Thanks to Parliament, it has once again been possible to bring roaming charges down. For the first time, this also applies to data roaming.

Vladimir Urutchev (PPE), *in writing*. – (BG) Let us give well-deserved congratulations to Ms Niebler on her great work in reaching an agreement with Member States to reduce the prices for using mobile phones and tablets while travelling in the EU. We all saw the increasing mobility of people in the EU, but using mobile devices abroad remained too expensive, especially for data transfer. This was an obstacle preventing small businesses and ordinary people from being integrated into the European family. This summer, European citizens will feel the reduction, and in just two years, roaming services will be at least half the price. The European Union needs such a policy in the current climate of crisis where measures are required to promote growth and the ever-closer integration of people and markets within the EU. I cannot overlook the fact either that the new roaming agreement provides for very strong measures to promote competition and enable more operators, including virtual operators, to enter this sector, without people having to change their telephone numbers and being charged for switching operators. I would go as far as to describe the developments in the roaming sector as some of the best news to come out lately, and the European Parliament deserves the main credit for this.

Zbigniew Ziobro (EFD), *in writing*. – (PL) Prices for telephone calls made between different Member States of the European Union are still too high. Therefore, I welcome the proposals contained in the Roaming III Regulation, which enable these prices to be reduced. It should be remembered that removing barriers from the internal market and reducing costs inside the Union not only allows greater savings, but strengthens the competitiveness of the Union compared with other countries. It is also one of the main principles of the theory of monetary union which lies at the basis of the European Union. We should, therefore, continue our efforts, and instead of establishing a maximum price cap, we should work towards bringing a complete end to roaming within the European Union. The mobile operators are technically able to do this, which means that their financial results will not be affected by such decisions. Similar rules should also be introduced to cover Internet data transmission and Internet access while moving around the European Union.

18. Follow-up to the LIBE delegation visit to Sicily and Lampedusa (debate)

President. – The next item is the statements by the Council and the Commission on follow-up to the visit by a delegation from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs to Sicily and Lampedusa.

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I would like to thank Parliament for the opportunity to participate in this debate and to respond to some of the issues arising out of the recent visit by a delegation from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs to Sicily and Lampedusa.

We all know the challenges that some Member States are facing when it comes to large and mixed migration flows to the EU. A number of these issues are more for the Commission to address. Furthermore, some of your questions should be answered by Italy as a Member State herself. I will therefore focus my comments on those issues which fall specifically within the remit of the Council. I will particularly try to clarify how the Council has sought to respond to the migratory pressures which Italy, among others, has faced recently.

The situation in the southern Mediterranean has been an important item for the Justice and Home Affairs Council, in particular, following the Arab Spring. In that respect, the Council last year adopted conclusions on the management of migration from the southern neighbourhood, as well as on borders, migration and asylum. These conclusions underlined

the need for genuine and concrete solidarity towards those Member States most directly affected, as well as for a comprehensive response to the underlying causes. Therefore, and building upon the work of the former Polish Presidency, the Council has discussed ways of better managing asylum and migration within Member States, in particular, by preventing irregular migration and through cooperation with third countries.

As part of this work, the Council agreed in March this year on a set of conclusions for concrete and practical ways to ensure solidarity towards Member States facing particular pressures on their asylum systems, including through mixed migration flows. They highlight, for example, the importance of responsibility and mutual trust, preventive cooperation, the need for solidarity in emergency situations, strengthened cooperation between EASO and Frontex, financial solidarity and strengthening cooperation with key countries of transit, origin and first countries of asylum.

On 26 April 2012, the Council agreed on an EU action on migratory pressures as a strategic response containing an extensive list of actions in six priority areas. The action plan aims to prevent and control the pressures arising from illegal migration as well as abuse of legal migration channels. It combines and develops common EU action points and tools to prevent irregular immigration. In addition to these measures, Member States have been encouraged to support the activities of Frontex in the region. This support includes a joint operation, EPN-Hermes, in the Mediterranean Sea, intended to assist Italy to address the increase in immigrants from North Africa trying to reach Lampedusa and Sicily.

Frontex has also assisted Italy in the area of border surveillance and search and rescue operations, screening of intercepted persons, debriefing activities and reaction capacity. According to data provided by Frontex, approximately 51 000 people were detected during 2011 in or near Lampedusa or in the surrounding area of Sicily. Most of them were Tunisians and sub-Saharan nationals.

Preventing such tragedies has to be a top priority. Support for Italy has also been provided through funds made available under the 'Solidarity and management of migration flows' general programme. We are also working on long-term solutions for those in need of international protection in the countries of the southern neighbourhood, such as resettlement opportunities and humanitarian assistance to countries in the region having to deal with people displaced because of the Libyan conflict. Hopefully, this will help relieve some of the pressures on Italy.

The Council is expected to adopt a set of conclusions soon concerning the EU approach to migration and mobility, including on EU cooperation with third countries regarding migration. Of course, we are also working to put in place a strengthened legal framework which will enable the Union and Member States to provide better responses to situations of this kind. The establishment of the Common European Asylum System is an important part of this and the Danish Presidency looks forward to continuing to work with Parliament and the Committee on Civil Liberties and the Commission in this area. For the Council, it is crucial that Member States fulfil their obligations both in EU legislation and in international treaties, and that will be, and will continue to be, the position of the Danish Presidency.

Neelie Kroes, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Mr President, everybody is aware that Italy faced very high migratory pressure from North African countries last year, especially after the events in Tunisia and Libya. Some 60 000 migrants arrived, many of them needing protection. Numbers so far this year are much lower: 790 people were intercepted in the

first three months of the year. We all hope the situation in North Africa will continue to stabilise, but people are still likely to try to cross the Mediterranean. Large influxes remain possible, and Europe needs to be ready to react. That, by the way, is not just an Italian issue; it is a matter of concern to the whole of Europe.

The EU acted quickly last year to support Italy, notably through the Hermes and Aeneas border surveillance operations coordinated by Frontex. Frontex stands ready to support Italy this year too. Those operations both intercept irregular migrants and rescue those in distress. Preventing tragedies at sea is a key objective. The Eurosur system we proposed last year should also help by improving detection and tracking of small boats, which should enable faster rescue missions.

Some of those arriving are fleeing persecution and violence and need international protection. EU asylum rules aim to ensure that those who need it have effective access to asylum procedures, even when they are part of mixed migration flows. The Commission closely monitors the implementation of those rules.

The closure of Lampedusa as a safe port of disembarkation is a matter of concern, something we quickly communicated to the Italian authorities. Commissioner Malmström was in Rome two weeks ago, and she was pleased to hear that Italy intends to renovate the damaged facilities so that Lampedusa can again become a point of first reception, assistance and initial screening before migrants are transferred to centres elsewhere in Italy, where their possible needs for protection can be assessed. The Commission looks forward to hearing the date for the reopening, and that reopening is part of a wider proposal which the new Italian Government has run up for an integrated strategy on management of the EU southern border. This proposal is very welcome, and we look forward to seeing how it is taken forward. The Reception Conditions Directive obliges the Member States to provide asylum seekers with appropriate accommodation. The Member States have some flexibility in how this is provided, and specifically designated reception centres are one option.

The Commission is in close contact with the Italian authorities with a view to ensuring appropriate conditions and will not hesitate to take appropriate action. When it comes to the detention of irregular migrants, the Return Directive includes important safeguards, notably, that the detainees must be kept in specialised facilities and must always be separated from ordinary prisoners. Families must be given separate accommodation, and children need access to education. The NGOs should be able to visit, and the detainees need to be able to contact their families and legal representatives. Both asylum seekers and those subject to a return procedure must have access at least to essential health care. Italy notified the Commission of its transposition of the Return Directive last year. We are currently checking that this was done in line with the directive.

As far as the guarantees I just mentioned are concerned, initial findings are that Italy has correctly transposed them. To help address those challenges, Italy has received substantial financial support from the EU, with a total of EUR 232 million allocated for 2010, making it one of the largest beneficiaries of the 'Solidarity and management of migration flows' general programme. This is before you count emergency financial support, which was over 18 million last year – and part of that was used to expand and develop government reception centres. The EU is also developing deeper contacts on migration and mobility issues with the southern Mediterranean countries where possible, notably including Tunisia and Libya.

Salvatore Iacolino, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, eight months have now elapsed since we went to Lampedusa, in Sicily, to note and observe at first-hand what had happened during a year of increasing migration flows.

However, the tragedies that have taken place in this period have not come to an end one little bit; quite the contrary. Even now, and already since April, other tragedies are being played out: 10 refugees have died *en route*, which is a worrying sign from which we can clearly deduce that not everything that might have been done up till now has been done.

We have a priority, which is to ensure that this House and the European institutions are seriously committed to three values – solidarity, responsibility and also courage. The Council, no less than the Commission, should probably have been much more courageous. To begin with, this is the case in the negotiations that must deliver more resources in the 2013 budget and the new 2014-2020 financial framework precisely for the protection and security of the EU's territory, and in the meantime, in cooperation with third countries, remembering the good work done by Frontex, which can and must be improved.

There are priorities that cannot be asked of others: bilateral agreements with border countries cannot be put in place by individual Member States. We should like to know what stage the agreement with Libya has reached and whether progress has been made with Tunisia and Egypt. What is more, when it comes to readmission, we need to ensure that readmission, wherever possible, can take place in the territory of origin.

The Mediterranean is a thousand-year-old area where the bonds of peace have always existed between the countries on its shores. Now more than ever, however, we have a prospect in which individual Member States cannot cope with an emergency that is European. It is Europe that must take on the burden: strongly, enthusiastically, passionately, immediately and without delay.

Rita Borsellino, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I was part of the European Parliament delegation that visited Sicily in November last year. The head of our delegation, Ms Wikström, wrote to the Italian Minister for the Interior, Ms Cancellieri, and has received a reply that is clear enough.

I should like to put on record first of all that since our visit, there has been a change of government in Italy, and there has also been a change of approach to the situation. However, the situation itself in the countries from which the flow of migrants largely originates has also changed. This is why we must not shirk from the need for a close examination of what has happened or of the situation as it is now.

The most important fact, still an issue, is Lampedusa's status as an unsafe port with the closure of the Contrada Imbraciola emergency assistance and reception centre following the fire in September 2011 in which it was damaged. However, the damage was only partial: a dormitory was wrecked and one of the facility's seven buildings was damaged, followed by the effective termination of the Presidium project.

Now, apart from the consideration that the only unsafe port in the Mediterranean was Tripoli in the Gaddafi era – and this analogy does not seem flattering to me – and given that the migration flows have certainly not come to an end, even though they have notably lessened both in numbers and for seasonal reasons, it is important that there should be a functioning emergency assistance and reception facility, and that it should be located at Lampedusa, which is the first landing point for those arriving from the opposite shore after journeys that are certainly not easy or free from risk. This is something the shipwreck

victims from Somalia who arrived in April this year know well, after seeing 10 people die on the barge on which they were travelling, or the 20 who were transferred from Linosa because there was no place for them in the other reception centres, or the 18 who are still in Linosa, living in the stadium's changing-rooms.

There is also the tourist residence of Cala Creta, where they are currently housed, which is certainly neither an identification and expulsion centre nor a reception centre for asylum seekers, and especially the fact that in the meantime, both the sanitary arrangements and the possibility of receiving asylum at Lampedusa have been removed. Everything has been entrusted to the goodwill and the kind-heartedness of the police or the citizens and volunteers of Lampedusa.

Another thing that must be borne in mind is the role that the centre itself has assumed in the recent past. After having allowed thousands upon thousands of people to gather, against all legal and ethical standards, in a place which, in terms of capacity and function, was only intended to accommodate a few hundred passing through, after having allowed an area of a few square kilometres, already made problematic on account of its location and logistics, to be forced to accommodate a number of people far in excess of the local population itself, we must give thought to who is responsible for an extremely tense situation, which then resulted in the fire itself.

I believe that a perusal and examination of the facts is enough to understand that it was precisely the removal from Lampedusa of the great number of people who had gathered there which led to all this. Today, the best relations will surely lead to a better state of affairs.

Cecilia Wikström, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (SV) Mr President, in November last year, I had the honour of leading the delegation from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs to Sicily and Lampedusa to visit and examine the centres for the reception of migrants seeking asylum. Prior to and following the visit, we asked the Italian authorities to provide us with information. This information was extremely meagre, if not to say entirely non-existent.

Information and facts relating to the migration flows are important in order to be able to understand the events that occurred during 2011 and to ensure that the mistakes that were made are not repeated in the future. Non-governmental organisations have told us that Italian authorities under the previous government did not handle the situation on Lampedusa in a particularly humane way. The reception facilities for migrants on Lampedusa were extremely overpopulated for a long time. People slept in the open air over the whole island, while, at the same time, transfers from Lampedusa to Sicily were postponed and delayed without reason.

This led to tensions and riots, which culminated in several buildings that were used for migrants being burned down, and the authorities decided to declare Lampedusa an unsafe port for migrants – not for fishermen or for tourists, but for migrants. We now need detailed information on what actually happened, and I would appeal to the Italian authorities and the Italian Government to now come back to Parliament with this important information and for the government to immediately declare Lampedusa to be a safe port for those having travelled on the Mediterranean.

After all, we cannot accept the lives of even more people being put at risk. It is unacceptable for deaths to be occurring in the Mediterranean while we are here discussing this. We must now ensure that all Member States accept their responsibility and guarantee the safety of

people's lives. With that, I would like to thank you for the floor and to state once again that Parliament is accepting its responsibility and now it is Italy's turn to do the same.

Franziska Keller, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – Mr President, migrants suffer not only from the loss of their home, from the long and dangerous journey, but also from the border policy of the European Union and the conditions they find here in a comparatively rich EU. The Member States and the Commission need to do their utmost to guarantee and protect the human rights of migrants, which are exactly the same human rights as those of everybody else.

Agreements with third countries with the purpose of holding back or sending back migrants are a major obstacle for the human rights of migrants and Italy's push-back practice has been condemned by the European Court of Human Rights. I wonder what consequences the Commission and the Council will draw from the Hirsi judgment. This is also one of the questions we asked in our oral question.

Agreements with countries like Libya have led to grave human rights violations but, instead of putting an end to this, with a Eurosur proposal, the Commission is encouraging Member States to conclude more and more bilateral agreements. An information exchange with third countries will lead to the holding back of migrants and to a *de facto* end to the right to asylum and the obligation of non-refoulement.

The bilateral nature of those agreements will also exclude Parliament from any sort of codecision and any sort of information. We should not let this happen in this Parliament. Instead of 'fortress Europe', the European Union needs to offer real protection and the right to asylum. It needs to have a common asylum system and the Council should no longer block this very important undertaking which, I think, will enable us to have a proper and better asylum system in the European Union and to guarantee the human rights of migrants and everybody else in the European Union.

Mario Borghezio, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the previous government was right to put a stop to the constant migration flows in circumstances that certainly did not allow a reception worthy of the name. One reason is that the centres – and the report is very vague on this issue – are regularly destroyed by their delightful occupants, whether they are illegal or irregular migrants, and of course Europe, the muggins in this whole affair, pays for this destruction with its taxes.

It is true that the European Union has provided significant aid, but part of this has been, has had to be used to rebuild what the kind third-country nationals have destroyed, at the cost of European taxpayers. And we should have the courage to set this down on paper!

Just as with regard to human rights, when these missions take place, we should also be concerned about making sure that the rights of workers are respected, as I have always done when I have been involved. Police forces and staff have to be protected, given that there have been cases of murder. Therefore, the government has done the right thing in regulating this emergency and these flows efficiently and energetically, in an attempt to help protect Europe's external borders.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – Mr President, for how long will Lampedusa be considered an unsafe harbour? In the meantime, migrants and asylum seekers still risk their lives at sea to reach it. Can the unsafe harbour status not be lifted before the works to restore the reception centre are finalised, given that the extent of the damage was very limited in any case? Is it really not possible to use other housing

facilities with appropriate reception conditions in the meantime? The residence used for the latest arrivals from the Horn of Africa does not provide for legal and medical assistance.

When will we know the exact numbers for arrivals in Lampedusa, the numbers hosted in different centres and the reasons why asylum seekers are detained in closed centres until their asylum applications are completed? Given that Italy received about EUR 20 million in EU funds in 2011 in relation to migration and asylum, I find it shocking that such information is not collected or else not divulged to us. How can we assess the situation and define an appropriate course of action without clear figures? The letter refers to past readmission agreements with Libya but does not mention the new agreement reached during the Minister's recent visit to Libya. Is the Commission aware of this new agreement? Is it a new agreement or simply the reactivation of the agreement concluded with Gaddafi? Which arrangements are foreseen therein? The Commission must ask Italy to inform it accordingly.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, if we do not change course radically, then we will have many more debates here on Lampedusa and mass immigration into Europe. As long as the European Union and most Member States continue to pursue an extremely lax asylum and immigration policy, every year, tens of thousands of people will be tempted to make the crossing to Lampedusa, to Pantelleria, to Malta, to the Canary Islands, and so on, with all the human drama that this entails.

People traffickers will be well served and they will be thankful to the politically correct bleeding hearts in the Commission and the European Parliament. Desperate times call for desperate measures. It is, therefore, in everyone's interest that people who do not qualify for political refugee status are sent back quickly and effectively to their country of origin and that they realise that they should not have set off on their journey in the first place.

However, that message must also be communicated very clearly. Ultimately, the EU must get its external borders under control, otherwise we will have no other option but to simply abolish the whole idea of the Schengen area and the open internal borders.

Simon Busuttil (PPE) . – (MT) Mr President, as stated by the previous speaker, there are other countries that are affected by this phenomenon apart from Lampedusa. Late last Sunday, for example, a surreal scene unfolded in Malta as ninety immigrants landed on a beach in my home country, and were offered help by a group of people who were holding a barbecue. That means that a group of people who were holding a barbecue ended up helping a group of over eighty immigrants. The immigrants said that their group included twenty women and four children, and added that seven of them had died during the journey. Their corpses were simply thrown into the sea.

Mr President, we are still in the month of May, and summer has yet to begin. The citizens of my home country are asking whether Europe will leave us to fend for ourselves once again. Moreover, in my opinion, this question should be asked not only with regard to Malta, but also with regard to Lampedusa and other countries. We need to take concrete action, for example, by concluding an agreement with Libya, so as to ensure that it cooperates with Europe now that it has a new government. Libya should also become a party to the Geneva Convention, thus enabling it to process applications for asylum seekers, some of which can then be received in Europe. Whilst we should check whether people arriving in European countries do have a right to receive international protection, without which we can rightfully ensure that they are returned to their homeland, we should welcome those who are eligible for international protection in Europe. However, we should not only

welcome them in the countries in which they initially arrive. This burden has to be shared between all countries.

Mr President, today is Europe Day, which commemorates a Europe that was founded on the basis of the principle of solidarity. We should ensure that solidarity is effectively implemented, even in this field.

Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, this debate is right to remind Parliament that it is part of its job to define a policy to tackle migratory challenges and develop a European policy for managing the EU's external borders.

In order to do, this we must listen and understand: listen to the national authorities in the Member States, who are the first to respond to any migratory challenge; to Frontex too, which was established precisely for this; to the humanitarian organisations, which deal with such sensitive problems as those we have seen; but also – how could we not – to the immigrants themselves who are suffering, knowing that Europe is behind the gate at which they are clamouring.

This was the objective of the trip to Lampedusa by the delegation of the committee that I chair, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), which took place on 24 to 26 November 2011, to remind us that we cannot allow external border states to feel as though they are facing this problem alone.

I am from the Canary Islands and I know what I am talking about. In Malta, Italy, Spain, in the Canary Islands, they understand the need to develop a true policy of solidarity. In order to do so, it is essential that the solidarity mechanism provided for in Community law has all the instruments it needs to provide the best service, which means strengthening Frontex.

It also means that the multiannual financial framework must take into account the issues and the funds needed to respond to humanitarian needs, and it means that the Council must play its part in the work to push forward the asylum package, which is being negotiated in trilogue as we speak, and, at the same time, it must be fully equipped in terms of content with the solidarity clause mentioned in Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and in the Treaty of Lisbon.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, after being there in July 2011, I was, of course, deeply affected, as we all were, by the stories, the journeys, the courage, the path taken by these men, these women, these children who were suffering, arriving every day in Italy on the island of Lampedusa, before being crammed into detention centres in terrible conditions, sometimes defying all humanity, violating all human dignity, a long way from the much coveted European dream.

There are both questions being asked and long-term political effects. Some such questions are: following our visits, we have all denounced the lack of information and today, one year later, we are still lacking information. How are the recent arrivals being managed? How many people have arrived? In what conditions are they living today? How many have been transferred to other centres or to the continent and where are the programmes on the island itself? We would like to know how the Italian authorities have used the more than EUR 232 million given to them to enable them to respond to this difficult situation.

However, there are also long-term political effects. Apart from the fact that the paradise shores of the Italian island will forever remain extremely famous – the island of hopes and

dreams for the arrival of these many Mediterranean boat people – I regret that this crisis in Lampedusa has brought us where we are today.

This migratory crisis has been caused by poor management with regard to the arrival of these immigrants, which has furthermore led us to a famous France-Italy episode, to Italy granting temporary residence permits for migrants, then to the closure of borders by France and by Mr Sarkozy, culminating in a dramatic result for Europe and European integration, to a debate, which is today highly politicised, on the Schengen area, and to a situation where Europeans no longer like Europe because of Schengen and where this is being reflected in the elections. A real policy is therefore needed ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Nick Griffin (NI). – Mr President, no decent human being can feel anything other than deep sympathy for young men who leave their families and risk death in overcrowded boats in order to reach a new land of milk and honey. But why do they do it? Who is responsible for luring these poor people into so much disappointment and even danger? The politicians. Because every time the political class insists on giving one batch of immigrants the houses, taxes and jobs that belong to the long-suffering natives in Manchester or Malmö or Brussels or Birmingham, you incite another boatload to risk their lives to get to the promised land and be given other peoples' milk and honey.

Three simple rules would end the immigration crisis. One: no jobs for immigrants while our own people face mass unemployment. Two: if a greedy boss is caught employing illegal labour, the business should be confiscated. Three: if you have not paid in, you do not get a house or a penny in benefits.

Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, the European economic crisis is not strong enough to dissuade illegal immigrants who risk their lives at sea. Why is this? It is because the difficult situation that they find themselves in here does not compare to the conditions there. Besides that, there is the question of asylum, which transcends and has nothing to do with purely economic situations or situations of another nature. Asylum must always be equal to protection.

I welcome Mr Iacolino's initiative as it is very appropriate and I agree that it should be extended and reproduced every year, but in December. The phenomenon of heading out to sea in spring is not a new one – it is predictable – and, although it cannot be avoided, it can be alleviated.

The Member States can control neither the Mediterranean nor the Atlantic front on their own. We need a timetable of solidarity, intelligence and diplomacy to do just three things: firstly, to try to stop them leaving at source; secondly, to patrol, save and help those who have managed to get out; and thirdly, to welcome those who have managed to arrive in decent and humanitarian conditions.

There needs to be coordinated action between the Commission, the Member States, Frontex and third countries. These are not easy tasks – I am well aware of that – but we must not hold an untimely debate each year that has limited effectiveness.

May I remind you that this discussion began in the parliamentary delegation sent to Sicily and Lampedusa almost six months ago. Then there is the question of the immigrant internment centres and the administrative detention centres, which must, without a shadow

of a doubt, improve their reception and residence conditions, and the question of a legal, safe return and resettlement subject to scrupulous respect for human rights.

As you can see, what I am telling you is not an issue that affects a particular country: it affects the whole of the EU and we must all make a commitment to providing an adequate response to this humanitarian challenge. We are late in saying this, but it is better to say it than not, and it is appropriate to do so on 9 May.

Claude Moraes (S&D). – Mr President, this debate should perhaps not be about the wider points of migration, on which we could all talk in great detail, but should be about the detailed visit by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs to Lampedusa. Here, I want to associate myself with the comments of Mrs Borsellino and Mrs Wikström, in the sense that there were some political changes in Italy but there are still some unanswered questions as to exactly where we are going with Lampedusa.

I would like our group to support the request that the Italian authorities designate Lampedusa a safe harbour for migrants. There is still plenty of suffering going on and we must ensure that this debate is about the collective response, ensuring that that tragedy is minimised, that all the resources are being used to minimise that suffering, and that we have a lasting medium-term and long-term solution which ensures that all of the resources go into minimising the suffering, ensuring that there is national support, supported by the Commission and other Member States doing what they can, to ensure that people are not left in a situation where there are no collective efforts to support a country in distress.

As other colleagues have said, this situation is repeated in other Member States. That is what we are here to debate, rather than other external issues. The Commission must do its job and we in this Parliament should ensure that the collective response is maximised.

Sonia Alfano (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I find myself for the umpteenth time – this is the third year of my term of office – and time and again we deal with the same problems as if it were the first time. And this year, as in every other year, we are once again witnessing a mass slaughter. The Mediterranean has now become an open mass grave. It is also the tomb of civilisation and, above all, the tomb of the hopes of thousands of people fleeing – men, women and children as has just been mentioned – fleeing from their countries and fleeing, above all, from civil and religious persecution.

Europe has major responsibilities because it has negotiated with murderers like Gaddafi, who have used these poor martyrs – and Gaddafi did so precisely to raise the stakes and at the very moment Europe was in negotiations with Libya. Every time, we find ourselves debating the issue as if it were the first time. What I want to know is what are we planning to do about it? What actual responses are we going to give our citizens? Yet again, this is another tragedy and, as Mr Moraes quite rightly has pointed out, the Italian Government may have changed, but we still have to give answers.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, it is important that, in today's debate on Lampedusa, we have again raised the immigration issues which the previous plenary addressed in the debate on the situation in Greece. Like Greece, which faces the problem of waves of immigrants from Turkey, Italy had to deal, on its own last year, with a large proportion of the immigration caused by the Arab Spring revolutions. That, if you remember, was the subject of intense debate last year.

During our visit to Lampedusa and Sicily, we all recognised the efforts being made by Italy; the reception centres were full and our colleagues in Italy were trying to expedite asylum

procedures. They are making serious efforts, but they face numerous difficulties. Of course, we all recognised that they still need a great deal of solidarity and assistance from the European Union.

I say this in order to point out that, when they see all this and understand the current situation, European citizens are choosing to support extreme views in what are crucial and historic times for Europe. I refer to Greece where, seeing the current levels and uncontrolled influx of illegal immigrants, our fellow citizens ultimately opted to support extreme, non-democratic, non-European views, which therefore obtained a large vote from the public in the elections three days ago.

At this point, we have what is, without doubt, a big problem. Unless our fellow citizens hear convincing answers, they will opt for dangerous paths, paths that lead nowhere. However, when extreme views are heard, we democrats all have a duty to demonstrate courage; courage to change Dublin II; courage to enter into agreement with third countries, with the countries of North Africa and Turkey; courage to implement a resettlement programme and to demonstrate real solidarity and ensure that the burden is fairly distributed.

Today, we are celebrating Europe Day. Robert Schuman said the following about solidarity 62 years ago: 'Europe will be built through concrete achievements which first create a *de facto* solidarity'.

Tanja Fajon (S&D). – (SL) Mr President, last year, we could have learned a lesson as we witnessed numerous tragedies at sea with boats crowded with migrants, but we obviously have not.

We can expect new tragedies to take place in the future unless we take drastic measures and unless European governments provide an adequate response.

I am pleased that the Italian Government has changed its position, as mentioned by Ms Borsellino. I myself took part in the delegation that visited Lampedusa.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, this year alone, at least thirteen different ships, each carrying one hundred refugees, have landed on the Italian coast.

The island of Lampedusa, which represents the first entry point into Europe, therefore continues to be a danger zone.

I did not get the impression that the reception centre on the island had been so completely destroyed that it could not be rebuilt as early as last year.

Now we are hearing that it will be rebuilt, but we want to know the date – when exactly? We want to know the answer today.

We cannot allow any migrants who are rescued to become the victims of detention on boats, which is what happened last year off the coast of Lampedusa as the island shut its doors.

Today, the immigrants on the island stay in a holiday home, but they have to wait for more than a month before they can apply for asylum.

After being tortured in Libya, the health condition of many is extremely poor. Their medication is paid for by volunteers and numerous new arrivals are suffering from post-traumatic stress.

I agree, we quickly need a solution for Lampedusa and we need the asylum and migration policy in the Union to be better implemented.

Ladies and gentlemen, today we are celebrating Europe Day. Let us stand up for an open Europe, a Europe that will not turn a blind eye to the plight of desperate migrants.

Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein (PPE). – *(PL)* Mr President, generally speaking, I am impressed by the debates in the House today. We had a long discussion on the future of the European Union, because today is 9 May. Beautiful and very important words were said here in the Chamber about the need to defend and the need to strengthen the European Union. Calls were made for the concept of a federal Europe to be talked about more clearly and openly, and for people not to be afraid of a federal Europe. We said a lot about solidarity, cooperation and mutual help, and now we are talking about migrants.

A debate about migrants from the southern Mediterranean, particularly after all the historic events about which the Members have said a great deal here, must not be a discussion between Members from Italy, Malta, Greece and the other Member States which lie around the Mediterranean. This is a European challenge, and it confronts us all. I listened to Mr Busuttill's dramatic speech and completely agree with what he says about sharing responsibility for the future of migrants in our continent.

Europe is the goal; a place dreamed of by many, many thousands of people from countries which are in a dreadfully difficult situation. They are ready to risk their lives. Many of them have lost their lives, as we have seen was the case in Malta last week. All of us in our continent are responsible for the fate of these people – people who are trying to get to us, using different ways, often giving rise to enormous problems. However, we are also responsible for the problems of the citizens, governments and local authorities in the places which are the first to come into contact with the migrants. Looking at the statistics, and at a small country like Malta, up to and including 2012, the Maltese army has rescued 15 000 people. I would therefore like to call once again for a common European policy on this drastic and very difficult problem.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today we are here because – as we have also heard here in this House – we are also celebrating our Europe, an institution created to bring together what are now 27 countries, to create a single market, to give some of these countries a single currency, and to bring together countries with the same vision and the same plans for the future, for culture, education, and much more.

One of the key words of this Union is solidarity. Today, the basis for this debate is what has happened in Sicily, what has happened in Lampedusa, including in recent months. However, this situation is clearly not restricted to Sicily or Lampedusa alone; it is something that concerns Malta, and has concerned and still concerns Spain.

Consequently, if this solidarity does unite 27 countries and wants to unite 27 countries, it must be seen and it must be felt. It is a solidarity that sometimes has not been felt by these countries, which sometimes have felt alone and abandoned when it comes to quite serious problems taking place on their coasts.

Today, however, we need to develop these aspects, we need to develop the tools that allow us to monitor our coastlines, and we also need to establish bilateral agreements with the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, agreements that will allow us to avoid migration flows of vast proportions. We have seen that this system is the one that works the best, that also gives people the chance to retain their dignity, not to have to flee the countries where they were born, and also not to deprive the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean of such human and professional riches.

Accordingly, if we are to celebrate this Europe, let us celebrate it also by remembering the reasons that make us united, that bring us together, and also that allow us to have a better dialogue with the countries of the Mediterranean.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Hubert Pirker (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, in the context of migration and combating illegal immigration, Europe needs action plans and not reaction plans. Therefore, I welcome the measures and the proposals that have been referred to today by the Commission and the Council.

However, I believe that we will achieve much better results if we put in place increased preventative measures in Europe; in other words, more targeted development aid to help people to help themselves and to improve the political and economic situation in third countries. Also, Europe should focus on providing information to the people in these countries to enable potential migrants to understand the consequences of illegal immigration and the opportunities for legal migration.

We must give Frontex greater powers and introduce readmission agreements that really work. All of these measures will damage the people-smugglers' business models and interfere with this criminal activity, which will help to reduce or even prevent illegal immigration.

IN THE CHAIR: GEORGIOS PAPASTAMKOS

Vice-President

Ana Miranda (Verts/ALE). – (PT) Mr President, I recall the words of Mr Portas, who said, with great dignity, that in Lampedusa, he felt it was worthwhile being an MEP. The European Parliament has an obligation to denounce this shameful situation in Europe, and resolving it is the combined responsibility of the European Union. Have we forgotten already? In response to the xenophobic political groups in this Chamber, the history of Europe is the history of emigrants.

Over the centuries, people in their thousands have fled Europe to improve their living conditions or in search of hope. Many left for Europe, but many also left for other continents. Which European country has not gone through times of enormous difficulty in its history during which many of its nationals had to seek refuge beyond its borders?

We need to integrate these people. It is a moral imperative for Europe. We need to denounce the fact that there are eight-year-old children who have been detained alone in reception centres or in prisons. A European solution is urgently required.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I do not understand why it is ultimately always the Italian authorities which come in for criticism. For example, people are asking why Lampedusa has been declared to be an unsafe harbour. Anyone with any sense could

answer this question themselves, because they would understand that the people who live in Lampedusa have justifiable concerns about their own security.

We need to draw the right conclusions and recognise that a large proportion of the refugees are leaving their home countries for social reasons. That is understandable, but they are not traditional asylum seekers. The asylum process needs to take place before the immigrants make their journey, for example, in third countries. We must also ensure that development aid is not linked to cooperation over the readmission of migrants. Dreadful events are taking place off the coasts of Europe and this is very sad. However, everyone who presents Europe as the promised land with an unlimited capacity to accept new citizens is partly responsible for this catastrophe.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, the delegation from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs seems to believe that the problems of migration are confined to the problems of the migrants. They were concerned that sub-Saharan Africans were suffering because one of several lavatories at Trapani did not flush. You simply do not have to put up with problems like that in sub-Saharan Africa. The delegation assumed that the local population in Lampedusa was pleased to act as welcoming hosts to the migrants. It came as a shock to them that, when the migrants escaped, they immediately clashed with the locals; indeed, the harbour was declared an unsafe area.

Rescuing migrants in danger from the sea is, of course, the only proper response. However, must the rescuer's country really be punished by having to entertain their requests for asylum? When the Italian and Libyan governments signed an agreement in 2010 to return the immigrants to their home countries, the flow of immigrants began to slow down immediately. The gratitude of the asylum seekers in Lampedusa was breathtaking. They thanked their hosts for supplying them with safe and expensive accommodation by burning it down. If you lie on the ground in front of incomers, you must not be surprised if they walk all over you.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, as you know, I am replacing Mrs Kroes in this debate. First a word on the steps that the Commission has taken regarding relations with Tunisia and Libya.

The EU is making progress towards developing its own cooperation with Tunisia and Libya. The EU launched a dialogue with Tunisia on migration, mobility and security in October last year. On 25 March, we held the second round of this dialogue and started negotiating the contents of an EU-Tunisia mobility partnership which we hope to be able to agree on before the summer break.

We are ready to start a similar dialogue with Libya as soon as conditions allow it and, in the meantime, we are providing the Libyan authorities with technical assistance. The EU is ready to provide support for the identification and assistance of persons in need of international protection in Libya, but so far, the Libyan authorities are reluctant to cooperate with the UNCHR and, more generally, to recognise refugees' rights.

A word, maybe, on the implications of the Hirsi case. It is essential that cooperation with third countries is carried out in full respect of EU and international obligations and, in particular, with the recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, Hirsi Jamaa and others versus Italy, which raises EU and international law questions.

When carrying out border control activities, Member States must respect fundamental rights and must refrain from taking any measures in violation of the principle of non-refoulement. The Commission will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that EU rules and international obligations are respected and to help avoid humanitarian catastrophes. We will continue to provide financial support. Expertise in dealing with large flows of immigrants is also available via Frontex and EASO.

I will, of course, pass on all of your remarks to the competent Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström.

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (DA) Mr President, Commissioner, honourable Members, the Council has set in motion a broad raft of measures to tackle some of the problems that we are experiencing in the Mediterranean region and that a number of Members of this House were able to see for themselves during their visit to the region. We in the Council will continue to offer Italy and the other countries in the region our full support. This has been – and will continue to be – a priority for the Danish Presidency, and we look forward to continuing our cooperation with Parliament and the Commission in this area.

We in the EU must give our full attention to dealing with illegal immigration into the Union. The EU is also under an obligation to ensure decent conditions and respect for human rights for everyone travelling into the EU at all times. Respect for human rights must always form the basis of our work. In the most recent proposal for the Reception Directive, which is currently being negotiated with Parliament, it is also noted as a prerequisite for the provision of decent reception conditions that the participating Member States comply with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, among others.

There will undoubtedly continue to be a focus on ensuring proper asylum and migration management in the EU, but I hope that Parliament has today gained an idea of the efforts that are currently being made on the part of the EU to tackle many of the problems that several Members of this House have also mentioned here today, including, most importantly, how the EU can assist the Member States with their obligations in this area. This is a task that is to be carried out jointly by the Member States, the Commission, Parliament and the Council.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) Reports about people attempting to cross the Mediterranean illegally to enter Europe make the news every week. There are very often tragedies behind these news headlines. Migrants are frequently in extreme situations, attempting to escape from critical conditions or acts of violence in their country of origin, not to mention that crossing the sea illegally is, in most cases, extremely dangerous. At the same time, these substantial migration flows are exerting a huge strain on the Italian authorities.

Just as we also confirmed with Greece during the debate in the previous part-session, no Member State can cope with such situations on its own. Solidarity is needed to find a solution and tackle emergency situations in an appropriate manner, along with cooperation not only between all EU Member States, mainly those in the region, but also between Europe's responsible agencies. I am thinking in particular about Frontex, which must be

more involved in the efforts to make Europe's borders secure. At the same time, cooperation needs to be stepped up with the states neighbouring the EU, and mechanisms must be found to get them involved more in managing the migration flows.

Ioan Enciu (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) The situation in Lampedusa symbolically reflects the problems facing the Common European Asylum System as a whole. There are currently serious concerns about how immigrants are treated, especially those applying for asylum in the European Union. This is partly due to the fact that European legislation in this area and the resources invested in immigration management are not up to tackling the challenges being faced.

This is precisely why European migration and asylum legislation needs to be updated as quickly as possible, with particular emphasis on ensuring that the negotiations with the Council on the asylum package are concluded as soon as possible.

Special attention should also be focused on concluding Mobility Partnerships, particularly with the states in North Africa, so as to put a stop to illegal immigration in the actual countries of origin.

At the same time, external borders need to be managed better to prevent illegal immigration. In this respect, adopting a new mechanism for assessing and monitoring the enforcement of the Schengen *acquis* is paramount.

19. Law applicable to non-contractual obligations (Rome II) (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Cecilia Wikström, on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs, with recommendations to the Commission on the amendment of Regulation (EC) No 864/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 July 2007 on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations (Rome II) [2009/2170(INI)] (A7-0152/2012).

Cecilia Wikström, *rapporteur*. – (SV) Mr President, I would like to start by thanking my former colleague, Diana Wallis, who worked on this issue right up until she left Parliament and I took over. It has been a very interesting and informative process to familiarise myself with this matter, and I would like to begin by thanking all of the shadow rapporteurs for their constructive cooperation and willingness to genuinely solve this problem, and for all of their contributions, comments and amendments.

We have now achieved our objective, we have a solution that we are all able to support, and we voted unanimously on this in committee. Why is this so important? It is because international libel cases are a reality throughout our Member States. Today, we are celebrating Europe Day, and we are pleased to see a Europe that is growing ever closer together. Our citizens move between countries and they have friends, acquaintances and family members from other Member States. Integration in Europe is something that we all very much welcome.

However, in keeping with the spirit of the times in which we find ourselves, there are more and more sections of the media wanting to report on people and events in other countries. The media are also consumed by people who live somewhere other than the country in which they were born and live and the country whose language they speak. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the number of legal proceedings relating to libel cases involving parties from different Member States could increase, and it might even increase

to a considerable extent. When this happens, there will be a dispute as to which country's legislation should apply.

In order to ensure that these international legal proceedings are handled in the best way possible, an addition to the current Rome II Regulation is needed, and that is why we are discussing and debating this today. In addition to this, there is also the opportunity for so-called forum shopping, where the parties attempt to direct their applications for proceedings to a particular country which, from their perspective, has particularly favourable legislation, and this is clearly not a good thing. We are trying to limit this forum shopping in every legal area.

In the most recent negotiations concerning the Rome II Regulation in 2005, there was broad agreement in Parliament on how these issues should be dealt with. Unfortunately, we did not succeed in getting all the way to a solution with the Council at that time. Instead, the issue has remained up in the air and unresolved since then. We now believe it is high time that we established clarity in this area, so that everyone concerned knows what rules apply.

During the course of this work, predictability was an essential requirement for me, as this is a vital foundation for a modern legal system and a society based on the rule of law. People have to know what rules apply. In the Committee on Legal Affairs, we therefore took Parliament's position from 2005 as our starting point and made a number of necessary changes.

We are now establishing a clear fundamental rule that the country in which the claimant is resident and to which a newspaper, television channel, radio station or similar form of media directs its message on the basis of the language it uses is to be the one whose laws are to be applied. If this is difficult to determine, then it must be the country in which the newsroom is based that applies.

It is unreasonable to expect our journalists and responsible publishers to be familiar with the defamation legislation in all countries before they decide whether or not to publish – this assumption could lead to self-censorship. Everyone ought to know which ground rules and laws apply, and it is important that this principle is maintained. Within the framework established by our common rules on fundamental rights and freedoms, it is then up to each Member State to find the right balance between these rights.

I hope the Commission is now prepared to take note of the legislative proposals that we have presented and that it will come back to us on these before long. I look forward to possibly even receiving an answer during our discussion here this evening, which would be very pleasing. Thank you very much for this, Mr President.

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I would like to thank Ms Wikström for her report on amending the Rome II Regulation, which formed the basis for today's resolution. My colleague, Viviane Reding, will look carefully into your recommendations.

In your report, you suggest including a provision on defamation in the Rome II Regulation. It is indeed true that the Rome II Regulation on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations excludes defamation from its scope, because it was not possible at the time to find a compromise between Council and Parliament during the negotiations on the regulation.

In 2010, the Commission carried out a study on the subject, which concluded that the solution to this matter could not be found without the minimum harmonisation of substantive law. Let me reassure you that the Commission attaches great importance to ensuring that the right of freedom of expression and of information go hand in hand with the right to privacy. The freedom and pluralism of the media must be respected, in line with the Charter of Fundamental Rights. At the same time, the fundamental right to privacy must be supported, as it protects against violations of privacy and rights relating to personality. Those two rights need to be balanced properly. With this in mind, the Commission takes note of your resolution, and we shall look into it when preparing our report on the evaluation of the application of the Rome II Regulation, expected to be adopted by the end of 2013.

Tadeusz Zwiefka, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the changes Ms Wikström has proposed in her report are important for me personally for two reasons. As rapporteur for the report on the review of the Brussels I Regulation, I am very well aware of how important it is, from the point of view of legal certainty, to have clear and explicit designation of the law applicable in a particular dispute. In addition, as a former journalist who worked for many years in Polish television, on the one hand, I am, of course, sensitive to the issues of freedom of the media and freedom of speech, but, on the other hand, I am also a zealous advocate of responsible journalism, the main objective of which is to provide the public with precise and reliable information.

As things stand, Rome II does not answer the question as to which law is applicable in cases of defamation. We live in a day of ubiquitous access to media and widespread availability of information on the Internet, and when cross-border disputes arise, it becomes easy to engage in forum shopping or ‘libel tourism’. Therefore, Ms Wikström’s proposal is, I think, very balanced, because as well as taking account of the rights of the person who has really or allegedly been defamed, it also has a reasonable approach to the question of freedom of the media. I am profoundly convinced that it has a good chance of succeeding in filling an evident legal loophole in the current Rome II Regulation. I welcome the Commissioner’s statement that this amendment is to be put in place as soon as next year, and we will await a legislative proposal from the Commission.

Raffaële Baldassarre (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate Ms Wikström on her work, the excellent quality of the report she has produced, and the compromises she has reached.

The purpose of this report is to plug what is, unfortunately, a serious and glaring gap in Regulation (EC) No 864/2007 (Rome II), which emerged due to the lack of an agreement on the law applicable to non-contractual obligations arising out of violations of privacy and rights relating to personality.

This has arisen, in particular, due to the considerable impact of accessibility via the Internet to content that is published and distributed on a massive scale on blogs and social networks. It is therefore a necessary step to facilitate access to justice, ensure the internal market functions properly and deliver an appropriate balance between freedom of expression and the right to privacy.

I therefore fully endorse the urgency in adapting Rome II highlighted by the report, and I am particularly pleased with the proposal to create a centre for the voluntary settlement of cross-border disputes arising out of violations of privacy and rights relating to personality. Considering the high costs of judicial settlement, an alternative voluntary dispute settlement

system, which would, of course, be less costly, could meet two needs. It could protect individual rights and personal image, while at the same time ensuring freedom of opinion.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as Italians, we are obviously particularly sensitive to this issue. I would like to thank the rapporteur for her work and the Commission for its words, especially its references to the clause and issue of defamation.

This is an important report, because the rapporteur has managed to find the right balance between personal freedom, privacy and legal certainty. Often, too often, we see examples of defamation, sometimes truly unwarranted, thanks also to the freedom of information offered by new technologies – the Internet in particular – with what are effectively invasions of people's privacy.

Therefore, I think that the idea of setting up and creating a centre for resolving or acting as a point of reference in disputes is truly a choice that represents both freedom and the rigour that we were all expecting. I also look forward to hearing what the Commission has to tell us about this in the future, also because today, perhaps too many things have been left unresolved.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Gesine Meissner (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, I believe that Ms Wikström has achieved a great deal in her report. It is obviously important to set up a central body which can find a solution in these cases and identify the correct location in the case of legal issues concerning the country responsible for resolving media conflicts of this kind. I believe that Ms Wikström has done a very good job. It is a pity that so few people have chosen to speak on this subject. Of course, there is a great deal of agreement in this area and so perhaps it is not necessary. This really is an important step forward that we are taking in Parliament and I am pleased about that.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, fundamental rights are of paramount importance, and effective compliance with them impacts on all EU actors and especially citizens. We all believe in free speech; we also believe that nobody's privacy should be violated.

The Commission takes note of Parliament's resolution and will carry out the necessary consultations with the interested parties before reporting next year. In all cases, the balance between freedom of expression and the right to a private life will be our guiding principle.

Cecilia Wikström, *rapporteur.* – (SV) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for an interesting, but brief discussion here in plenary. In view of the drama surrounding this report over a number of years, I had expected a much more lively discussion, but, as I mentioned, the report was adopted unanimously in committee, and I really hope that it will also receive strong support tomorrow.

As someone said, it is a question of bridging a gap and finding the right balance between freedom of the press and fundamental freedom of expression, on the one hand, and an individual's right to privacy and legal certainty, on the other.

I obviously welcome the Commission's interest, and I expect you, Mr De Gucht, to speak to Ms Reding about this. I look forward to her returning here to Parliament quickly with

concrete proposals. After all, such a proposal already exists, so it should not require a huge amount of work on the part of the Commission for us to be able to receive back a proposal that we will definitely be able to adopt. I am relying on this, and I look forward to the forthcoming proposal.

For our citizens, it is good to be able to say, on this day of celebration for Europe, that we now intend to fill the void that existed, so that free movement and citizens' legal certainty will once again be safeguarded from this perspective, too. With that, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I look forward to tomorrow's vote here in plenary.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 10 May 2012, at 11.30.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The Rome II Regulation lays down which law should apply to non-contractual obligations where more than one Member State is involved. This includes, for example, product liability or *culpa in contrahendo*. Essentially, the regulation states that the law which applies is either that of the country in which the damage has occurred or in which the person affected normally lives. Until now, however, Rome II has not applied to cases relating to protection of privacy and freedom of expression, but the increased use of the Internet has given rise to numerous cross-border cases in precisely this area. Rome II does not harmonise the substantive law of the Member States. The regulation contains conflict rules that make it possible to determine the applicable law. I would not be in favour of substantive harmonisation, as the Member States often differ in the way they balance the legal rights to privacy and freedom of expression. This balance must be respected, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.

20. Trade and investment strategy for the southern Mediterranean following the Arab Spring revolutions (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Niccolò Rinaldi, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on Trade for Change: The EU trade and investment strategy for the southern Mediterranean following the Arab Spring revolutions [2011/2113(INI)] (A7-0104/2012).

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, in the last year, we have seen unprecedented developments in our southern neighbourhood. The European Union must therefore provide full support to these countries in their paths towards democracy and prosperity, not least through our trade and investment policies.

Last year, I had preparations stepped up for negotiations on deep and comprehensive free trade areas with the four WTO members undergoing democratic transition. We have also sought to maintain negotiations under older mandates, namely on agriculture, services and industrial standards.

With the exception of services negotiations with Morocco, we did not advance far enough, but this was largely due to administrative changes on the other side, with transitional governments deploying resources to achieve other priorities. We did, however, manage to unblock the revision of pan-Euromed rules of origin between the EU, EFTA, Turkey, the Mediterranean and Western Balkans partners. We continue to push for a timely completion of this process.

In December 2011, the Council finally adopted negotiating directives for deep and comprehensive free trade areas with Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. The main objective of these future negotiations will be the progressive integration of the economies of these partners into the single market.

We have begun preparations for negotiations in March with Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan. We are ready to initiate negotiations as soon as the preparatory process is completed, based on an assessment of the commitment of each partner to long-lasting democratic and economic reforms.

As with eastern neighbourhood partners, negotiations will be subject to key recommendations by the Commission. These agreements will be comprehensive, covering a full range of regulatory areas of mutual interest such as trade facilitation, technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, intellectual property rights, public procurement and competition policy. They will also include provisions on investment protection and on further liberalisation of goods, services and establishment as appropriate.

The Commission will take into account, in negotiations, the different economic situations and priorities of each partner country as well as their sensitivities. The Commission agrees on the need to enhance our trade relations on the basis of the more-for-more principle with countries where a deep and comprehensive FTA is not immediately possible, such as Libya, Lebanon or Algeria. The immediate priorities should be their accession to the World Trade Organisation, and contacts in this respect continue. With Libya, we also need to define the most appropriate trade framework for our relations. In all the actions undertaken, we will continue to encourage economic integration within the southern Mediterranean region, which is still poorer than anywhere else in the world.

An integrated Mediterranean market will be much more attractive for investors. We will continue to support efforts to reinforce the Agadir agreement between Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia and to extend it to other regulatory areas through trade and services, investments and public procurement.

This also includes providing financial assistance and expertise to the members of the Agadir agreement, and we will continue to support industrial cooperation. Since 1995, we have been sharing knowledge and good practice in spurring entrepreneurship and improving the business and investment climates across the Euro-Mediterranean area. Industry ministers of the EU and the southern Mediterranean adopted the Euro-Mediterranean Charter for Enterprise in 2004. This policy document provides guidelines for conducting reforms and promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, which employ as much as 25% of the workforce in the region.

Last but not least, the Commission will also invest in student mobility and academic exchanges. We put 743 additional Erasmus Mundus mobility grants at the disposal of southern Mediterranean students and academics for the 2011-2012 academic years, and there will be more of these in the coming years, including for the future Erasmus for All programme.

Mr President, honourable Members, the Arab Spring presents a major challenge for the EU in terms of accompanying our partners towards democracy and a market economy. This will not be an easy task – you are well aware of the complexity of trade and investment negotiations. We hope we can count on the European Parliament's support.

Niccolò Rinaldi, *rapporteur*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to apologise to the Commissioner – my dear friend. So, now is the time to give some practical responses to the Arab Spring.

Europe has followed what has been happening on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean with enthusiasm. We have followed with enthusiasm, concern and a certain element of surprise what had happened and was happening during those months, and what is still happening with the difficult situations in Egypt, Libya especially, and of course Syria.

Sometimes I – hesitantly – remember some of the statements by European foreign ministers who, not much more than a year ago, literally – and I remember this because it shows how far we have come – defined Gaddafi as an example of reformism for the rest of Africa, a statement made last February, and Syria as a country – and again I quote – capable of meeting its citizens' need for modernity from its leadership. This is where we have come from. Another statement from February last year.

In the end, however, with the support and empathy of Europe, the Arab Spring eventually emerged with difficulty, and it was a marvellous change. What has happened in the southern Mediterranean has been extraordinary, and is also a reason for great hope, but naturally there are a lot of difficulties ahead. What help can we give as Europeans? What can we do in practical terms to try and make these people taking steps towards democracy understand that economic development also offers prospects for a better life?

We have two problems, among others. The first is that the potential for trade between the European Union and southern Mediterranean countries is definitely under-utilised. We are doing less than we could be doing. The report contains some figures, I will not quote them here, but given the geographical proximity and the fact that we all belong to a single area, Mediterranean Europe, the commercial policy figures are certainly rather unsatisfactory.

The second problem is that traditionally we – especially the southern Mediterranean countries – have structured our trade relations in such a way that trade with Europe mainly benefited an elite, an oligarchy which often managed the flows from this trade in an extremely exclusive, if not selfish manner. The Arab Spring is trying to liberate political processes, and subsequently we also need to liberate the economy, in order to ensure that those who want to become producers and players in a global economic and commercial process in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Libya and the other countries really can do so, and can have a direct dialogue with Europe.

This also means trying, also through a commercial policy, to provide practical help in a social situation that is sometimes desperate. In Egypt, revenues have fallen over 35% compared with during the Mubarak era. There is little investment, tourism is a resource that has almost run dry, and therefore we need new political tools, and here I think that in our work, we have proposed a series of practical elements to meet these expectations, and we will return to these in the final summary. Meanwhile, I would like to thank the Commission heartily for the constant support it has given me as well as the shadow rapporteurs.

Spyros Danellis, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development*. – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, securing democracy and political stability in the southern Mediterranean is vital both for the area in question and for the European

Union. I need only mention the repercussions of the uncontrolled waves of illegal immigrants on the European Union and the piracy caused by the collapse of Somalia.

Food security is therefore needed and income needs to be generated and distributed. In order to achieve this, job creation needs to be facilitated and women and smallholders need to be integrated into the economy. The European Union must support investments in agricultural and rural infrastructures, the diffusion of knowledge and institutional improvements, while at the same time ensuring that this does not impinge on natural resources, energy and the climate.

In order to develop trade, we must: a) promote regulatory convergence between the EU and the southern Mediterranean, bearing in mind the consequences on sensitive sectors in EU agriculture and the need to protect the European agricultural model; b) promote a model to develop regional trade between North Africa and the Sub-Saharan countries; and c) take steps on a global level to avoid unilateral action that impinges on trade.

Cristiana Muscardini, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I feel it is symbolic that today, a day that celebrates Europe, Europe itself, the European Parliament should tackle the problem of a new commercial strategy towards the southern Mediterranean, especially in view of the fact that this will not only be a commercial strategy, but the start of a series of stronger and more incisive initiatives regarding the democracy, development and well-being of these countries.

One of Europe's missions is the well-being of its citizens, but also the concern for the well-being of citizens of other nations, especially those closest to us. The Arab Spring has changed the politics and economic structures of the Mediterranean area, and confirmed the strategic role of international trade as a tool – if correctly used – for marrying economic relations with the processes of democratisation and development of society. The development of trade and greater focus on small and medium-sized enterprises can lead immediately to a process of development and social well-being, which is useful for promoting greater stability and democracy in these countries.

The principle of 'more for more' – more aid for more commitment – introduced by the Commission must become a market principle, because without more commitment on the part of the governments of these countries towards a real opening up of the markets and implementation of suitable economic reforms, it will not be possible to create an area where the market will be truly free and functioning, which is what we Europeans want. It is important that the European Central Bank does not make some of the same mistakes in the Mediterranean that it has made in Europe, especially as far as small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-enterprises are concerned, as these have an important role to play in the economic development of the area.

I would like to thank Mr Rinaldi because his report highlighted these points very carefully, and the focus on micro-enterprises and small enterprises represents a hope for stability, economic and also social progress.

Maria Badia i Cutchet, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it has been said here that the Arab Spring has given the European Union a great opportunity to renew and strengthen its cooperation links with neighbouring southern Mediterranean countries. The main priority has been to provide the necessary support for the processes of democratic transition in those countries, with the aim of ensuring respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, equality and justice. In this

context, trade relations take on an essential role and go hand in hand with the necessary political and institutional transition insofar as they provide resources for the economic and social development of those countries.

With adequate rules and conditions, trade can contribute to strengthening the EU's links in the region and supporting the efforts to establish democracy. It is one of the EU's responsibilities to ensure that all the elements of cooperation – in terms of both politics and trade; in short, two sides of the same coin – are well balanced and truly benefit the European citizens and the citizens of the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

I believe that this report on Trade for Change, to which we are referring today, sets out measures and proposals to ensure that this objective is fulfilled. As has been said here and as the Commissioner has also said, the 'more for more' principle is an introduction and represents a crucial first step in this direction, and we are awaiting its coming to fruition as soon as possible through the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Lastly, I would like to mention some elements which, in my view, are extremely important for this trade policy with the region: the effort to combat child labour and respect for international labour law; encouraging development niches for information and communication technology (ICT), which, in turn, would support young people – it is becoming ever clearer that young people are the main users of those technologies and this would serve in the fight against youth unemployment in the region; it should be remembered that the population of these countries between the ages of 10 and 19 represents 20%, while in the European Union it represents just 11%; – and, last but not least, promoting sustainable rural development that allows for the production of quality products in accordance with the traceability criteria and maintaining a fair trade balance.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Rinaldi, on his good work and also for an excellent collaboration.

Metin Kazak, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (BG) Mr President, I congratulate Niccolò Rinaldi on his comprehensive and timely report. I am in favour of the Commission's decision to start negotiations on deep and comprehensive fair trade agreements with Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, whose aim is to remove the remaining tariff barriers on goods and agricultural products, address non-tariff barriers and expand the scope of the trade agreements, which should, in the long term, result in limiting poverty and promoting much sought-after peace and prosperity in the region. I also welcome the 'more for more' principle introduced by the Commission, but urge the European External Action Service to announce more quickly the criteria on the basis of which, along with the commercial scoping exercise, it will be decided whether a certain country meets the conditions for such an agreement.

This concerns small and medium-sized enterprises, which actually employ 25% of the workforce in the region. This strong role they play is a prerequisite for a successful trade strategy for the southern Mediterranean. This is why I endorse the call to provide reliable, accessible and easy to understand micro-credit schemes for these small and medium-sized enterprises. Provision should also be made for visa facilitation agreements for business people, in coordination with the trade negotiations and without unnecessary bureaucracy. I regret the fact that the civil societies in the southern Mediterranean countries still regard the European Union as not being active enough in its support of the reform process. This is why I believe that the trade agreements should be backed by tighter clauses on human

rights, improved monitoring and implementation mechanisms, and an ambitious chapter on sustainable development.

Once again, congratulations to Mr Rinaldi, and I truly believe that this is a good, timely report.

Ulrike Lunacek, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, a little over a year ago we all – or at least most of us – criticised the policy pursued in previous years by the EU and lots of Member States towards the southern Mediterranean countries. This was a policy which mostly focused on stability and on getting oil and other resources from autocratic or even dictatorial regimes. This has changed, and we, as Greens, were strongly in favour of the more formal approach that the Commission announced last year, making it clear that European policy in the future will not be about the exclusion of civil society, of women, or of groups that are not part of a ruling elite. It was clear, too, at that time, that the Commission said it would also focus on the economy and on trade.

For us, as Greens, the positive aspects of this report as negotiated in committee are the inclusion – and our thanks go to Mr Rinaldi and all the other shadow rapporteurs – of environmental issues, of sensitivities on the environment and ecology, and of the emphasis on social rights, with the provision that all social forces are to be included in negotiations for free trade agreements or indeed, deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTAs), on transparency, on the inclusion of civil society and on the importance of regional cooperation and the need to go through the Agadir Framework. Nevertheless, as Greens, we have some reservations about what FTAs and DCFTAs might mean in terms of the liberalisation of trade in a way that mostly serves the interests of the EU economy and big EU agricultural groups, without taking into account the interests and expectations of citizens in the southern Mediterranean.

Mr Rinaldi rightly said that, as Greens, we have certain reservations here, and we are demanding that the aspects of inclusiveness and transparency, now present in the report, must also be present on the Commission's side when negotiations on agreements are being concluded. We would also prefer to see negotiations within the Agadir Framework, rather than bilateral negotiations, because we consider the regional approach to be more important.

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

Daniel Caspary (PPE), *Blue-card question*. – (DE) Mr President, Ms Lunacek, if I have understood you correctly, you have just said that the main purpose of a free trade agreement of this kind is to promote our interests and those of large companies, rather than serving the needs of the people. Do you agree with me that in recent years, there has been economic growth and an increase in prosperity and people have been lifted out of poverty primarily in areas of the world where there has been an opening up of markets and participation in world trade?

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE), *Blue-card answer*. – (DE) Mr President, you are right that in some parts of the world, economic growth has already helped to reduce poverty and that some groups of people in individual countries have succeeded in improving their living standards and lifting people out of poverty. However, in all the countries with which we have free trade agreements, we have seen that a focus on agricultural exports in particular has led firstly to products not being produced primarily for local and regional markets and for local people, but instead for export, which has resulted in increased levels of poverty.

Secondly, and this point is very important to us in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, far too little importance has been given to the question of human rights, participation in civil society and democratisation in these countries, even by the European Union. That is what we are pushing for and without it, there will be no social justice.

Lajos Bokros, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, the report claims that the Arab Spring is the greatest political transformation in the European neighbourhood since the fall of the Berlin Wall. This reminds me of Zhou Enlai, the famous former Chinese Prime Minister, when he was asked for his assessment of the French Revolution. He is said to have answered: 'It is too early to tell'. Democracy may have taken root in Tunisia; there is more openness in Morocco; there are encouraging signs in Jordan. But what about Bahrain? What about Yemen? What about Egypt? What about Libya? It would be better to use slightly more cautious language.

The report also claims that trade is an effective means of consolidating democracy and promoting stability. Well, trade in itself is not an effective means of promoting democracy. It is important – no question about it, and we promote free trade – but trade alone can help dictatorships as well. Trade does not necessarily lead to democracy. We need trade to be supplemented with institutions, the rule of law, constitutionality, equal opportunities and support for small and medium-sized enterprises in order to channel the fruits of trade to a wider segment of society. For democracy to take root, there is a need for a middle class, which, in turn, can only flourish on broad-based economic growth – something which trade alone cannot guarantee.

The report also calls for the reconsideration of odious debt. I am only familiar with big debt and small debt, but not odious debt. I remember very well when the Berlin Wall fell. No western state, no western country wanted to forgive Communist debt, no matter how odious it must have been, so why do you not call on the Italian state to take over all the debt? If Mario Monti were to agree to that, then your claim would be credible.

Mario Borghezio, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that in its laudable desire to help develop, aid and, I would suggest, influence the meaning and direction of the Arab revolutions in the sense of opening up towards democracy and economic development based, obviously, on a productive economy, the Commission has failed to meet its objective by linking all of this to the possibility of exporting agricultural products, etc.

Undoubtedly, some pertinent comments have been made on this subject, because if we deprive these countries of their agricultural products, we impoverish them. In addition, why do we not start thinking seriously about the role of our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), in order to introduce them there as a real work-training tool, which your bureaucrats cannot do as it can only really be done by those who know how SMEs are created, and that is by our small and medium-sized enterprise owners. Let us therefore encourage them to cooperate.

Cooperation and economic recovery can only take place from the bottom up, with serious, concrete actions, not statements of principle and philosophical comments, which achieve nothing.

Paul Murphy, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – Mr President, rapporteur, the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East are historic: they have given tens of millions of people right across the world the hope and confidence that they can shape history and that they

can overthrow even the most brutal dictatorships. But the history of revolution has, of course, more than one chapter, and the first chapter still has to be closed in many countries of the region such as Bahrain and Syria, while in Egypt and Tunisia, the revolution faces new challenges.

The new political leaders continue to ignore the interests of the majority of people in those countries, as the recent wave of repression against protestors demonstrates, vindicating the statement by Irish revolutionary Henry Joy McCracken in the 18th century, that the rich always betray the poor.

The EU and its Member States failed the people in North Africa and the Middle East through their political support and their economic ties with these brutal dictatorships. They will fail them again if they push ahead with the free trade agenda and the establishment of true market economies.

The NGO War on Want has explained that the creation of an EU-Mediterranean free trade area would cause the near collapse of manufacturing sectors in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia and a massive contraction in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. Whether economic development and trade will deliver for, or will fail, the millions of people who overthrew the tyrants will depend on the nature of the economic and trading system.

There needs to be an end to gambling and speculation on food prices, maximum prices on food and other basic goods, and guarantees of a decent return for farmers, in order to guarantee food sovereignty and food security for the countries of the southern Mediterranean. The debts inherited from the dictatorships are odious: they should all be cancelled immediately to give a breathing space so that economies can develop. In addition, the natural resources and major sources of economic wealth in these countries should be taken out of the hands of the multinational corporations and the rich, and taken into democratic public ownership for use as resources to invest in the economy, health care and education, in order to create a society worthy of the heroism shown by those who participated in the revolutions.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, it may look very good on paper that the European Union's trade and investment strategy for the countries involved in the Arab Spring is linked to democratic progress. In practice, the Arab revolution has long since turned in many areas into an Islamic one. The Arab peoples are obviously often more interested in prosperity than they are in democracy. This is precisely what the Islamists, whose organisation extends into even the smallest rural villages, have promised.

Democratic values such as minority rights and human rights are something with which the Muslim Brotherhood is not familiar. Following their election successes, the Islamic parties have not only occupied key posts, but are also apparently now attempting to apply pressure on the people. Women, artists and minorities have emerged as the losers from the Arab Spring and the situation of Christians in the Arab world is a particular cause for concern. In Egypt, pressure is being exerted on the Copts and in Iraq, the exodus of the Christian minority has begun. There is also the fear of violence against Christians in a post-Assad Syria.

Therefore, in my opinion, EU development aid to the Arab Spring countries should definitely be linked to an obligation to protect Christian minorities. If these countries simply stand by and watch while Christians are discriminated against or even encourage discrimination of this kind, their subsidies must be reduced and, in extreme cases, stopped altogether. In

addition, EU funding must be linked to readmission agreements for illegal immigrants. We must monitor carefully whether these countries are prepared to comply with the agreements.

Daniel Caspary (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, what is the general situation really like in the countries in this region? Mr Bokros has given us a very impressive description. We are at the start of a process and, unfortunately, there is a fear that, by the end of it, democracy will not be established in every country. Instead, it may be the case that Islamist groups will be in power in some of the countries. This is why I would like to see us making every effort to introduce improvements in these countries in the short term, so that the people there realise that democratic systems can genuinely help them and allow them to move forward.

Mr Kazak mentioned the question of micro-credits, among other things. I would also like to see us making progress in this area. The economy consists mainly of small companies and micro-enterprises and we are deluding ourselves if we believe that large firms will start to open new premises there. We will have to focus primarily on the small companies and micro-enterprises that already exist. If many of them can create one part-time or one full-time job and employ more people, this will allow the region to move forward. This is why I have great hopes of the micro-credits.

On the subject of investments as a whole, we must do everything we can to take the political dialogue with these countries forward. Money will only be invested when all the basic conditions are right, including democracy, the rule of law and legal certainty for the people who have made the investments. This is why we urgently need to intensify our dialogue over the next few months. To do this, we must have staff on the ground.

Mr De Gucht, there is only one external trade official in our office in Tunisia and there are no representatives of the Directorate-General for Trade in Jordan. This makes it clear that we must ensure in the short term that we have more people on the ground and that we perhaps need to discuss this with the Members of the Committee on Budgets in the context of the forthcoming budget debate. I would like to thank Mr Rinaldi very much for this very balanced report.

Gianluca Susta (S&D) . – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I thank Mr Rinaldi for his broad-ranging report, which is worthy of support in political terms, and packed with ideal aims and practical proposals that will undoubtedly be looked upon with renewed hope by the people living on the shores of the Mediterranean after the revolutions that have taken place in their countries.

We need a change of pace and a return to the spirit of the Barcelona Declaration in order to overcome the fragmentation characterising trade relations between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries. Only a short-sighted view of the EU's strategic role could consider that a policy of greater integration with the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean contradicts the EU's western vocation.

Trade governed by a balanced new free trade agreement could also represent an instrument of stability in a region criss-crossed by uprisings that have not yet perfected an approach to democracy, which also involves reducing inequality, strengthening production, better protection for civil and social rights, and commitment to avoiding Islamic fundamentalist tendencies.

Of course, this does not just depend on us, on the European Union. It also depends on the tremendous difficulties of cooperation and integration experienced by the countries on the southern shores. However, to paraphrase a great writer, if the Mediterranean becomes a project once again rather than a state of affairs, together we can overcome the current political and economic obstacles that have prevented a good agreement being reached in the past.

We need an EU initiative towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to hold more in-depth talks about legislation with all countries in order to eliminate the excessive number of tariff and non-tariff barriers, and to open their markets up towards reciprocity, which means that a larger amount of aid must be tied to greater commitment on the part of our partners.

In conclusion, I can only repeat my appreciation of this report and trust that the Commission will make it a priority objective of its political and administrative agenda.

Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE). – Mr President, the transition to democracy of the countries in the southern Mediterranean must be enhanced by creating a favourable environment for trade and investment. Therefore, I am pleased with the Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations for deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTAs) with some of the southern Mediterranean countries. It is essential that conditions are created for a strong middle class to emerge in the region. The DCFTAs will invigorate these countries' economies, which, in turn, will allow new jobs to be created.

Unemployment and low standards of living are the main causes of migratory flows from the southern Mediterranean. Prosperity in the region would, on the one hand, reduce the migratory pressure on the European Union, in particular, in its southern Member States, and, on the other hand, open emerging markets for European enterprises, which is also a very important perspective.

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, the Arab Spring was undoubtedly the most important political transformation in the Middle East and North African countries in decades. Despotic and corrupt – but secular – governments were cast aside, and promises of freedom abounded. However, the transitional governments that have emerged so far have mostly failed to live up to their laudable commitments to plurality, with Tunisia perhaps being the sole exception.

The EU is a powerful trading bloc with a significant and proven ability to influence the conduct of governments through soft power. The EU should therefore use its exclusive competence in trade matters, and the fact that it is a significant aid donor with the ability to influence multilateral banking institutions such as the EIB and EBRD, to ensure that democracy and human rights are fully respected in our southern neighbourhood.

There is now considerable concern, with the election of some fundamentalist parties such as the Salafist al-Nour party in Egypt, which are insistent on introducing hard-line Sharia law into the constitution. This jeopardises women's rights, homosexual rights, minority rights and, in particular, the rights of Coptic Christians, who will not only be discriminated against, but actively persecuted if this goes through. In such a case, if Egypt also wishes to unpick the Camp David Agreement, the peace treaty with Israel would also be in danger.

The EU must reserve the right to suspend all aid and trade concessions in protest and as a possible sanction. 'More for more' alone is not enough.

IN THE CHAIR: ALEXANDER ALVARO*Vice-President*

I would like to give a very warm welcome to our visitors from Lower Saxony who are sitting in the gallery. Welcome to the European Parliament!

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL). – (ES) Mr President, Mr Murphy has already stated the position of the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left in his speech and I believe, Mr President, that the European Union is not in a position to be giving advice to any region in the world with regard to economic models or trade models. We are in no position to give advice, and even less so advice based on the need to deregulate the market.

This principle, this dogma, the ‘great God’ of deregulating the market, which has been applied with the utmost rigidity in the European Union, is leading us to ruin in the European Union and, therefore, this principle is a principle that should not be followed, and I hope that the leaders of the Arab revolutions do not do so themselves. It is not about moving towards free trade agreements that fail to take into account the imbalances, since that would impoverish these populations further.

Look, the calling card left to coastal countries in its day – the calling card given to Ben Ali, Mubarak or Gaddafi, which we have given to Mohammed VI – is that the European Union cares little about economic development. What it cares about is big business.

Laurence J.A.J. Stassen (NI) . – (NL) Mr President, now that the smoke of the conflict in North Africa has partially lifted, the European Parliament has found time to develop trade relations with this region again. As far as the delegation of the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV) is concerned, this is too premature and should be preceded by a request to that effect. Can we really talk of an Arab Spring?

Allow me to help you answer that question. In Tunisia, two bloggers have recently been sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment because of their atheist views. That same Tunisia is considering criminalising establishment of any relations with Israel and enshrining that in law.

Unfortunately, the situation in Egypt is no better. It is estimated that, this year alone, 1 500 Coptic girls have been abducted, girls who have been circumcised and forced to convert to Islam. There is also the threat of the Islamic sharia being introduced in Egypt.

I put this question to you: do these developments really deserve the designation of ‘Arab Spring’? Would anyone dare use these words in the presence of all those women, Christians and non-Muslims who are being oppressed? Instead of an Arab Spring, we are facing the threat of an Islamic Winter. I hope that my fellow Members have the courage to face up to this.

The rise of fundamentalist Islamic parties in the region is at odds with the values we hold dear in Europe. We have to ensure that we do not make rash decisions about promoting trade relations with such regimes. If we do that, we will be sending out a totally wrong signal.

The message which the European Union needs to promote is that, as long as regimes continue to commit human rights violations or fail to act against them, we will not be prepared to extend relations with them. We owe that debt to the victims and the many vulnerable minorities in the region.

María Auxiliadora Correa Zamora (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, the Arab Spring is an historic milestone that should help our neighbouring countries to make progress on the path towards democracy, respect for the fundamental values of human rights and a free society. We must make the most of this time to strengthen our trade relations with these countries, contributing to economic development and progress along both shores of the Mediterranean.

It is a key time for making progress in terms of opening up goods and services markets and establishing a framework guaranteeing the legal certainty of investments and adopting environmental, plant protection and social standards that benefit citizens from both sides.

However, any proposal that deals with sensitive areas must be preceded by appropriate impact studies. We must exercise the necessary caution with regard to sensitive areas for the European Union such as agriculture, an area that is currently making enormous efforts, which, in some cases, even means abandoning crops. That is why the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) has requested a split vote on paragraph 19, removing the reference that 'the EU must be prepared to make additional efforts in sensitive areas such as agriculture'.

Josefa Andrés Barea (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, there is a before and after to the Arab Spring – many speakers have said so. There is a commitment to help these southern Mediterranean countries in the transition to democracy, these countries that are still in the process of transformation or that are stuck in a tunnel and cannot get out of it. There is a need to provide instruments alongside the trade agreements that serve as levers for change, democratisation and stabilisation.

As the rapporteur has said, the amendments that have been presented, the human rights clause, democratisation, sustainability and corporate responsibility are essential conditions that all agreements should include, and although we are facing a new generation of trade agreements – which started with Morocco – within bilateral negotiation frameworks, we must recognise that there are certain sensitive areas, as is the case with agriculture, and that not all EU countries suffer the negative consequences that trade agreements can produce to the same extent.

Therefore, we are in favour of these trade agreements, and of this new generation of trade agreements, but we want this reciprocity clause, which must be present in all bilateral agreements, to be studied, we want impact studies and also, above all, we want studies on measures or instruments that divide the costs throughout the countries of the EU.

I think that the problems arising within EU countries with regard to more sensitive areas such as agriculture, self-employed workers and small businesses should also be ironed out, particularly in the countries most affected by these issues within the EU.

Ewald Stadler (NI). – (DE) Mr President, Mr De Gucht, as Ms Stassen has rightly said, there can be no question of an Arab Spring or even of a thaw as a sign that spring is on its way. On the contrary, it has become clear after a year that secular authoritarian regimes are being replaced by elected Islamic authoritarian regimes. This is a highly explosive and dangerous development, in particular, for the minorities in these countries.

The indicators of democracy are respect for human rights and also the treatment of minorities, including religious minorities. The Christians in these countries are in a drastic situation. An hour ago, there was a conference in this House organised by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and the European Conservatives and

Reformists Group. During the conference, it emerged in reference to a study carried out by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that 75% of the people killed in outbreaks of violence in these countries were Christians. That is not a coincidence. It is due to the Islamisation of these countries. The Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists regard Christians as their enemies and as part of the Western world. Of course, they fail to appreciate that in reality, the Christians are part of the Arab world. This fact is being ignored.

Therefore, I am calling on the Commission to take into consideration that one condition of the agreement must be that these countries treat their Christian minorities differently.

Gay Mitchell (PPE). – Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Rinaldi for this report. With many dictators deposed, we have a unique opportunity in the EU to engage with North Africa and the Middle East and to help create a true social market economy in this region.

On this, Schuman Day, may I remind the House of the origins of the social market economy. I believe it is time that we followed on from that Christian Democratic tradition and put 'social' back in the social market economy. We do not need to replace some dictators with others, whether they are capitalists or socialists or oligarchs controlling the markets and controlling the lives of people. What we need is a social market where people not only have rights and social justice but where they have responsibility and a sense of enterprise.

If you want social justice and the wealth that is needed to create the public services we want in these new countries that are looking for good governance, then you have to encourage the enterprising spirit to create that wealth – and I do want that social justice. I have looked at the failed system behind the Berlin Wall. The Berlin Wall days are gone! We are not going back to that system of protectionism where bully politicians control the lives of people.

Let us look at who some of those dictators were and who they were associated with in their international, political arrangement. I believe that with every right goes a responsibility; a responsibility for each other. People get up in this House and they preach about rights, constantly misleading people that somebody else can provide those rights or that somehow, by some magic formula, we in this House can – with our clay feet – legislate rights for people; but the responsibilities that go with them are not there. We have to insist not only on good governance in the Middle East and Northern Africa, but in this part of the world as well, where social market economy means that there is a true social market – not manipulated, not dictated, not politically controlled – and where social justice is at its centre and where people who, by the sweat of their brow, create wealth, are encouraged to be able to use that wealth for the good of the community.

Corina Crețu (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, the main political transformation in the European neighbourhood has actually paved the way for democracy in the southern Mediterranean, but has also turned these countries' entire economic systems upside down. There is the risk now that the wave of hope will be swamped by a vicious circle of poverty. The social upheaval is exacerbating the economic decline which, in turn, is swelling the ranks of the unemployed, especially among young people and women. According to the estimates from the Organisation for European Cooperation and Development, 25 million new jobs are needed in the next 10 years just to maintain the current level of employment.

Based on the experience of the transition made by the countries of Eastern Europe, I believe that this is an extremely tough objective to achieve. The aim of the Arab Spring was to obtain democratic freedom and a better life for ordinary people. The European Union has a direct interest in supporting these countries by undertaking an ambitious inter-regional

commitment to update the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area project. In addition, the deployment of the trade and investment facilitation mechanism put forward in the Euro-Mediterranean trade road map and the establishment of the new rules of origin under the Pan-Euromed Convention may provide a significant boost to trade, especially at a time when the countries in the region will no longer be members of the Generalised System of Preferences.

Angelika Werthmann (NI). – (DE) Mr President, this report once again makes it clear that the Arab Spring is a unique event. It is an event which bears witness to the longing of the people in these countries for better living conditions based on democratic rights and freedoms. Therefore, during the period of economic growth, these people have particularly high expectations of the EU.

The Euro-Mediterranean free trade area is an ambitious economic project. If the economic process becomes more democratic and supports the creation of small and medium-sized businesses, this will mainly benefit the citizens. However, this requires trade in a variety of areas, which will be advantageous both to small farmers in the Arab Spring countries and to our farmers in Europe. Naturally, all of this must, and can, only take place on the basis of respect for all human rights.

Guido Milana (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the excellent report by Mr Rinaldi has been a success in the House. I totally agree with the excellent opinion of the report.

Nevertheless, I would like to raise a small issue. Compared with this new world that is trying to seek democracy and different economic conditions, our Europe is a Europe divided by the Mediterranean. It is precisely this special focus on the Mediterranean that I would like the Commission to have, as regards both environmental issues and economic trade in the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean is a fishing area. We are building a new fisheries policy in Europe in which Europe will set some very strict rules. On the other side, however, there are no rules. Therefore, why not use forms of fisheries agreements, support for these countries so that they apply the same rules that are applied in Europe? This would be healthy for European fishing, healthy for the sea and environmental conservation, and would ensure that this division becomes ever smaller but an increasingly homogenous place on which to build the future of Europe and of this new world.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, the European Union needs to support reform in the Arab states, including via its trade policy. It is our duty to do this. More than a third of the working population in the southern Mediterranean countries are involved in agriculture. An increase in trade with the European Union is therefore expected.

However, a number of rules need to be observed in this regard. We must insist on these countries coming into line with the European Union's standards on quality and food safety, environmental protection and animal welfare, in keeping with the principle of reciprocity. European farmers are obliged to comply with the highest standards in the world in these areas. Any imports must meet the same standards before reaching the European consumer's table.

Therefore, I agree to favourable trade for both sides, but not to unfavourable terms for our farmers.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL) . – (PT) Mr President, this report claims that the European Union is now in a much better position to develop its foreign policy and its national trade agreements with the countries of the southern Mediterranean. However, it is worth remembering that prior to this, the nature of the old regimes had never bothered the European Union or its governments, with which they had established close relations.

In line with the European Commission, the report promotes the idea of more for more; in other words, the democratic reforms and individual freedoms should be reflected in a so-called liberation process in economic and trade terms by consolidating the Euro-Mediterranean free trade area. Is that, however, liberation or colonisation? So far, free trade agreements have only proved that they mean the loss of sovereignty of the people, the appropriation by multinationals of natural resources and biodiversity, increased foreign dependency for third countries and disaster for productive sectors in some Member States.

What is needed is the establishment of fairer, more equal economic relations that serve the people and not free trade agreements that benefit certain economic and financial groups.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD) . – (SK) Mr President, the social changes that the Arab Spring has brought to the southern Mediterranean have, to some extent, changed the political landscape in this region. The EU has to have an interest in the long-term stability and prosperity of the Arab countries that have undergone these major changes. Trade is one area that allows countries to improve partnerships and strengthen mutual trust. It is therefore necessary, alongside assistance with the development of democratic structures, to focus on a resumption of trade and economic cooperation between the EU and this region. We must provide effective help, in particular, with the renewal of economic structures – from small family producers to micro-enterprises to large companies employing local workers – as financial and economic self-sufficiency is essential if people are not to leave their countries and seek a future through economic migration. We must therefore make the necessary effort today and help not only with the political, but particularly with the economic, stabilisation of this region.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, a lot of interesting remarks have been made and I have taken good note of them, but I am not going to respond to them in detail because the Members who put the questions are no longer here, so they cannot hear me. They will have to read me.

Let me just add that we will, of course, be cautious in this whole process. We have political considerations, trade considerations and human rights considerations. We have to take all these into account. The report produced by Mr Rinaldi will certainly help us to do so.

Niccolò Rinaldi, *rapporteur*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to invite the Commission not to be too cautious, on the other hand, and, above all, I would like to invite the House not to be too fixated on the agricultural issue.

We cannot carry on considering trade relations between the European Union and Mediterranean countries solely from the point of view of agriculture and, in fact, the report takes a totally different line. We asked for more connection with civil society, more study grants – and I would like to thank the Commissioner for what he said at the beginning on

the development of the *Erasmus Mundus* programme – I believe – it is not an issue which concerns the DG Trade – but I believe that it would be useful also to have an *Erasmus Med*, something specifically for the Mediterranean countries, as a written declaration from Parliament had, in fact, requested.

We are calling for bilateral chambers of commerce between the European Union and the Mediterranean countries which do not yet exist. We are calling for new credit instruments, something – also through the work we have done with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) – is starting to happen, also for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and we are especially calling for liberalisation of this trade through the possibility of allowing new players and entities, like SMEs in fact, to emerge in southern Mediterranean countries. There is an extraordinary amount of talent in this area in the Arab countries that has always been suppressed by the oligarchies in power.

In this sense, technical cooperation to dismantle non-tariff barriers – all elements of our report – is crucial. Let us not miss this opportunity. We have the opportunity to use commercial policy, the exclusive competence of the European Union, to do a truly political job, part of which has still not been done, in order to support these processes.

There are those who say that nothing has happened, that there have been no Arab Springs. I challenge anyone in this House eighteen months ago to imagine that Mubarak, Ben Ali and Gaddafi would have fallen from power in their countries in the space of a just a few months. Something has happened, and the development and outcome depend also on us, and also on commercial policy instruments, and I must just briefly say a word about the contribution of our Green friends who have just left us: do not have an ideological approach. It is not true that commerce is not good for development, quite the opposite. The report demonstrates all the rest.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 10 May 2012, at 11.30.

Written statements (Rule 149)

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D), in writing. – (RO) Events in the Mediterranean region have led us to rethink our relations with the countries neighbouring the EU. The European Union has a key role to play in promoting respect for human rights, pluralism, rule of law and social justice in the southern Mediterranean by stepping up not only political but also commercial cooperation with this region.

The unequal distribution of incomes, the lack of social and economic reforms and the precarious nature of the education systems and jobs were some of the main causes of the revolutions triggered in the Arab world. Support is needed from international financial institutions to aid these countries' economic development and regional integration in terms of trade.

One important step towards this is the decision to extend the mandate of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) with the aim of taking part in the process of providing financial aid to the southern and eastern Mediterranean. In light of this, I would like to urge EU Member States to ratify the amendments to the EBRD Agreement urgently. The bank has the expertise required to ensure the transition to functioning democracy in the countries in the region.

Tunne Kelam (PPE), *in writing*. – The EU's strongest incentive for democratic change in third countries is its trade and investment perspectives. The Arab Spring revealed some embarrassing structural and systemic shortcomings in EU policies dealing with the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. A new EU trade policy has to provide incentives for structural reforms, and also contributing to food and water security in the region. This will be the most effective means of convincing the people of the region that political democracy is the most efficient way to economic progress and justice. It is good that the report is very clear on the involvement of civil society in all social processes. I emphasise the need for the EU and its civil society to be proactive and work hand in hand with local civil society to assist and support their efforts. Only a pluralistic and vibrant civil society can bring about the change from within and ensure that democratic efforts are pursued. I remind the EU to be firm in its strive for trade and investments, making sure that economic relations are accompanied by achievements and real results in respect of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Economic liberalisation and democratisation need to be complementary and simultaneous to each other.

Vladko Todorov Panayotov (ALDE), *in writing*. – The Arab Spring had a strong negative effect on private investments in the region. Since January 2011, a lot of these investments have been transferred to other countries which were considered more politically stable, such as Turkey. The EU shares responsibility for this. Indeed, the slowness of its reaction and the lack of political will and coherence resulted in investors' lack of confidence. Depending on the country, the post-Arab spring political situation is taking more or less time to stabilise, but we can be confident at this stage that the southern Mediterranean countries will find a way towards democracy. We should encourage this transition by boosting public and private investments in the region, through the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership, with emphasis placed on SMEs. That the EU manages to send the right signals at the right time is crucial. This is not just a matter of economics; this will define its credibility in a region where half the population is under 25 and which promises to be increasingly dynamic.

Tokia Saïfi (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Practical and realistic proposals – this report constitutes the pragmatic counterpart to the Commission's communications following the democratic movements in the Arab world in 2011. The rapporteur puts forward the need for a coordinated, flexible and proactive EU policy and relays, in this regard, the aspirations of the civil societies of southern Mediterranean countries.

I would add, however, that the economic integration that the EU advocates and wants to develop should, first and foremost, focus on South-South economic integration. The Commission, in its communications, considers that economic integration requires integration into the European market. In my view, this is only a second step: once the markets in southern countries have integrated among themselves, and once the EU has helped them to adapt to its technical and health standards, then access to the internal European market will be of real interest and will have a concrete impact on southern economies.

I also support the rapporteur's idea to analyse, by means of impact studies, the effects of European trade policy on the economic systems of these countries. Such a study will allow for a rapid adjustment of European measures.

21. Patenting of essential biological processes (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the patenting of essential biological processes.

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, the issue of the patentability of essentially biological processes is very sensitive, and the patenting of plant-related inventions is particularly sensitive for plant breeders.

Biotechnological inventions relate to biological material, meaning any material which contains genetic information and which can either reproduce itself or be reproduced. Such inventions concern either a product consisting of, or containing, biological material, or a process by which biological material is used or produced.

Biotechnology is very diverse and covers agriculture, pharmaceutical, medical or industrial applications. Therefore, biotechnology offers a great potential to assist us all in our daily lives and in life-saving circumstances. It is a hallmark of the European capacity for innovation.

The number of patent applications relating to plants in Europe has been stable over the last decade, with an average of 800 applications per year. Since 1990, some 1 700 such patents have been granted, of which slightly less than 100 concerned non-genetically modified inventions. This may seem low compared to an overall number of 2 100 patents granted in 2011 in the sole field of biotechnology. However, because of rapid technical progress in breeding activities, the granting of plant-related patent rights creates potential tensions.

The directive on biotechnological inventions, or 'Biotech Directive' for short, sets limits on the patentability of biotechnological inventions. Similar provisions also exist in the European Patents Convention (EPC).

Let me be very clear here: elements occurring naturally cannot be patented. They are mere discoveries and not inventions. To be patentable, an invention must have a technical character, be new and inventive, and must not be exempted from patentability.

With regard to the third condition, the Biotech Directive and the EPC set strict exclusions. Essentially, biological processes for the production of plants may not be patented. Such essentially biological processes consist purely of crossing and selection.

Breeding techniques have, however, substantially evolved in the past years. Modern, so-called 'smart' techniques make breeding more efficient; they use markers which allow for the targeted selection of existing plant material genes for further breeding. In the so-called 'broccoli' and 'tomato' cases, the enlarged Board of Appeal of the European Patents Office clarified that conventional breeding methods are still excluded from patentability even if they make use of marker techniques.

However, some grey areas remain, in particular, as to whether a new plant which is a product of conventional breeding may itself be patentable. Of course, if this product is a plant variety – for example, Angel's Dream, one of the 3 000 varieties of tulips – it cannot be patented. But the issue arises where the invention can be applied to different plant varieties. This question will soon be examined by the enlarged Board of Appeal. We therefore expect further guidance in the future.

A biotechnological patent is granted in order to promote innovation. Under the breeders' exemption principle, it should, however, not keep breeders from innovating further by using protected material to create new plant varieties. The Biotech Directive does not explicitly address the question of a breeder's exemption. In some Member States though – Germany and France for example – such an explicit provision exists in national patent legislation.

The Commission intends to take a closer look at questions concerning the breeders' exemption, and also at the issue of essentially biological processes, in the coming months.

As already mentioned in our replies to written questions by honourable Members, the Commission will indeed publish a new report under Article 16(c) of the Biotech Directive covering breeders' relevant issues, national developments and the relevant case-law.

In conclusion, let me assure you that the Commission is taking the concerns raised – especially those related to blend breeding – very seriously. We are already looking closely into the matter and will deal with all relevant topics in full transparency and openness. Commissioner Barnier will be happy to provide further information on this subject.

Martin Kastler, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Mr De Gucht, your statement was very informative. Thank you very much. Sometimes, figures say more than words. Up to this point, as you have mentioned, the European Patent Office has granted almost 2 000 patents for plants and almost 1 200 patents for animals created with and without the use of genetic engineering.

I would like to mention two prominent examples. The first is the approval of patents on barley which has been genetically modified and modified by breeding. This applies to the entire chain from the seed through to the plant and, therefore, affects both our farmers and our brewers, both producers and consumers. This example shows the devastating scope of the patenting processes.

The second example concerns the so-called long-life tomato, which is not to be confused with the long-life oil in the engines of your diesel cars. The ploy used by the applicant, the US company Arcadia, enabled it to obtain a patent by circumventing current EU regulations. It was not the tomato that was patented, but its genetic material, in this case, selected enzymes.

This shows the lengths that companies will go to, despite the fact that, as you have said, Mr De Gucht, Article 4 of the directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions of 1998 clearly states: The following shall not be patentable: (a) plant and animal varieties; (b) essentially biological processes for the production of plants or animals. We are of the opinion that this definition should be made more precise. Technical processes used to support conventional breeding activities must not lead to patentability. We would like to make it quite clear that there must be no patents on life. We need to send out a clear signal that there needs to be a more ethical approach and greater honesty with regard to creation. I repeat: we are opposed to the patentability of life throughout Europe.

Therefore, Mr De Gucht, we are calling for a clear statement from the Commission that patents on genetic material and genetic resources are, and will remain, banned. Secondly, we are calling for a clear position on Article 4 of the directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions: no patents on life. Thirdly, Mr De Gucht, on behalf of many farmers and breeders in Europe, we are calling for the breeders' and farmers' privilege to be clearly enshrined in all legislation.

Evelyne Gebhardt, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr De Gucht, this is an extremely important discussion. Of course, we are all in favour of inventions being patented and of protecting new products in a way that genuinely benefits the people who have invented them.

However, when it comes to breeding methods in biological fields, we need to consider very carefully what actually constitutes an invention and what is just a discovery or a development of a natural breeding method. That is one of the questions which arises in the context of patenting. There are some cases, including tomatoes and broccoli, where we have to ask ourselves in which direction the Convention on the Grant of European Patents is moving.

Mr De Gucht, you have yourself just admitted that, as far as patentability and the implementation and interpretation of the law in this field are concerned, there are some grey areas. It is precisely these grey areas we are referring to when we say that we need to think about how we handle this issue. We must ensure that the wide range of different varieties and breeds that we have in the European Union and the varied breeding methods, all of which have their own value, are not destroyed by patent claims that are too far-reaching.

We must also ensure that small and medium-sized businesses can continue to develop and exercise their breeders' privilege and that this is not ruined by granting patents which will prevent this privilege from being applied and which will no longer allow these businesses to make free use of the natural material that is readily available.

This is one of the points that concerns us and we are asking the Commission, Mr De Gucht, to focus its attention on this area and to evaluate to what extent the bans which we imposed in the directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions, and which involved heated debates at the time, are really being respected. The principle that what the European Patent Office has laid down, in other words, that not only the explicit wording of the claims but also the overall technical theory behind the application needs to be considered, must be applied and respected.

Cecilia Wikström, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (SV) Mr President, on most occasions, I am able to start my speech in plenary by thanking my colleagues for their excellent cooperation, but, unfortunately, I am not able to do that this time, as the cooperation was very poor. Despite the fact that, as I understand it, the work on this resolution has been going on for a long time – more than a year – the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe has only been included in the process now at the very last moment.

When we are facing important European challenges, I think it is important that we are open in our debate and in our approach, as we need unity in Parliament when it comes to strategies for growth in Europe beyond the economic crisis.

When, only a few days ago, we were finally able to study the text of the resolution, it was just as clear as it was regrettable that we would not be able to support this proposal. We have not been able to study it in detail, we have not been included in the process and we have therefore chosen to withdraw. However, in order to enable discussions to continue, we will propose tomorrow that the vote be postponed until the next part-session.

If the vote nevertheless goes ahead tomorrow, we will vote against the resolution. We will also vote against the two amendments concerning embryonic stem cells. Including embryonic stem cells in a resolution concerning intellectual property for breeding and

improving plants seems strange to put it mildly, and I wonder where our intellectual integrity has gone to in this process.

What we are seeing today is an imbalanced resolution that seeks to interpret various decisions by the European Patent Office in such a way as to score its own political points. It has been negotiated without any scrutiny by our group, the ALDE Group. It contains blatant factual errors – in paragraph 7, for example, in which it is claimed that there is a comprehensive breeders' exemption in patent law in the EU for plant and animal breeding. This is incorrect. It exists in certain countries, Germany for example, but absolutely not at European level. This ought to be corrected, and therefore we propose that the continuation of the vote be postponed.

The ALDE Group will not support this resolution, but thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Martin Häusling, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Mr De Gucht, ladies and gentlemen, despite the fact that the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe is not involved, because it is divided over its position, we have a broad majority in favour of an issue which is of great interest to the general public, even though there are different interpretations of current law.

We have a number of standards, including Directive 98/44/EC, which clearly state that patents cannot be granted for breeding animals and plants. However, to put it mildly, the European Patent Office (EPO) has interpreted the rules very broadly. There have been several cases where it is clear that the European Patent Office has breached the terms of the directives adopted by the European Union. In order to explain this independent interpretation of the directives, it is only necessary to say that suddenly granting patents for conventional processes for breeding plants and animals does not comply with what is clearly stated in Directive 98/44/EC.

The products of these breeding processes will also be protected by patents and this goes against the spirit of what we want to see happening in the European Union. Therefore, we must warn the European Patent Office that it must comply with the terms of the legislation and not overinterpret them.

There are still 1 000 applications outstanding for plant breeding and a total of 3 986 applications for animal breeding. This means that there are still plenty of things to discuss, including in the European Parliament. Of course, we must take seriously the concerns of farmers and breeders. The increasing number of patents brings with it the risk that large companies will monopolise plant and animal breeding. To a certain extent, it also reduces the variety of genetic resources available, which puts further restrictions on farmers, and conflicts with farmers' inherent right to breed plants and animals themselves. We must prevent this from happening.

Last week, the European Patent Office had to reverse a decision concerning the separation of sperm. This is also a point which we in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance complained about at the time. Now this patent has had to be withdrawn. We have achieved a clear victory, but this is only the beginning of the process of political evaluation of what the EPO is doing in many areas. Nevertheless, I would like to see us adopting this resolution with a large majority. This will send out a clear sign that the vast majority of Members of the European Parliament want a change of course. We want the Commission to focus on this issue and ensure that it is clarified. Mr De Gucht, you have just said this yourself.

If necessary, the Convention on the Grant of European Patents must be made clearer. Breeding is not invention and there is a farmers' privilege. None of us want patents on life.

Vicky Ford, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, the patentability of smart breeding techniques raises very important issues for the research and development involved in the seed industry, and is a very complicated issue. The processes in these breeding techniques introduce additional steps beyond those contained in conventional breeding practices. These steps and processes require considerable research and development, and therefore entail costs. We must be mindful of the need to protect those investments in order to provide appropriate incentives for future innovation.

Whilst it is right to consider the need to facilitate access to genetic materials, we also need innovation to address the huge challenge that we have with food security in the future. I therefore support my group's amendments, which call for a detailed debate on this issue. This Parliament should not unilaterally direct the decisions of the European Patent Office and should definitely not do so by means of a backdoor resolution, without proper stakeholder input. The issue is too important for hasty proclamation without proper consultation.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, plant breeders' rights, which include a breeders' exemption, guarantee protection and independence for breeders. Any breeder is entitled to freely use a variety in order to develop a new one (restricted breeders' exemption) and is also entitled to freely place his/her new variety on the market (broad breeders' exemption).

It is necessary that we also incorporate such a breeders' exemption in patent law. It seems to be the case, namely, that varieties are even being patented indirectly, for example, through patents on a particular characteristic. Incidentally, I reject such an exclusive claim to God's creation on the grounds of principle.

My first question to the Commissioner – and I promise you that I will wait until the end of the debate for your answer – is as follows: is there a prospect of a revision of the Biopatent Directive?

My final question concerns the regulation of a unitary patent. The Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE), which has been asked for its opinion, advised the committee responsible, the Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI), to incorporate a restricted exemption for breeders in the regulation. Unfortunately, the amendments to that effect, contributed by my esteemed colleague, Ms De Lange, among other members, were not accepted by JURI. How does the Commission view a restricted breeders' exemption in the regulation in terms of cooperation on unitary patent protection?

João Ferreira, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Mr President, in recent months, more than 70 000 people and nearly 300 organisations have given powerful expression to a campaign against the patenting of seeds. This broad-based movement, rooted in various national campaigns, has drawn attention to the way in which the legislation on patents in the European Union has been implemented, in that it paves the way for the patenting of plants and animals, genetic material and essential biological processes: in other words, life itself. This unacceptable path has led, for example, to the creation of genuine monopolies in the production processes of the agriculture sector. Two multinationals control and divide up the market between themselves at the cost of ruining many small and medium-sized producers and reducing product diversity and consumer choice.

The ethical, social and political implications of this issue are far-reaching. For this reason, we applaud the citizens and organisations that have taken part in this campaign. It is one thing to invent genetic transformation processes by using molecular biology, but the product – the living organisms created by such technologies – is something different.

It is not acceptable for there to be intellectual property rights over these organisms, just as it is not acceptable for there to be patenting of conventional genetic selection processes, cross-breeding processes or selected products of such cross-breeding, such as new varieties of plants and animals, or laboratory-assisted selection processes where entire genomes are involved. From that point of view, this regulation introduces some clarity where it was needed.

Philippe De Backer (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, the resolution before us concerns a highly technical debate, one in which we have to set to work in a well thought-out way and not rush anything. I, personally, have a background in biotechnology and understand that we need to strike the necessary balance between protecting intellectual property rights and providing the opportunity for breeders to develop new varieties and to protect them, too, with plant breeders' rights.

However, some of these debates have been brought to a head in this resolution. In the 1998 Patent Directive, plant and animal varieties, as well as essential biological processes, were excluded from patentability. There is, nonetheless, a lot of disagreement about the interpretation of this principle and, therefore, the Enlarged Board of Appeal of the European Patent Office has concluded in its previous decisions that it is impossible to provide an unambiguous interpretation.

We therefore need a more thorough and balanced debate. The fact that the Commission has indicated that it wants to come up with a new and transparent proposal is an important signal. After all, in this resolution, not only have traditional and conventional breeding methods and their products been excluded from patentability, but new technologies, such as marker-assisted selection and other innovative technologies, have been rendered unpatentable. This is a potential constraint on innovation in the European Union.

Another problem is the broad exemption for plant breeders' rights which has been proposed in the resolution. This breeders' exemption is already included in plant breeders' rights, but it is restricted by the concept of essentially derived varieties. Under patent law, too, this exemption exists in only a few countries and, even then, it is extremely restricted and intended only for the development of new plant varieties, and not for their commercialisation. The resolution takes absolutely no account of these facts. Amendments concerning stem cell research, too, are unacceptable to us and are unconnected with the rest of this resolution.

The present resolution displays too many factual errors and steers the debate in a direction that is not where we want to go. We need to find a balance between protecting intellectual property, safeguarding and encouraging innovation, and providing the opportunity for breeders to develop new varieties. We, therefore, want to change some important points of the resolution and we cannot support it in its current form.

Europe has driven out much of the plant biotechnology industry because of inappropriate and ideologically inspired regulation in the past. Let us not make the same mistake again with this resolution.

John Bufton (EFD). – Mr President, in recent years, there has been a growth in the number of applications to the European Patent Office for patents on plants and animals derived from conventional breeding. Without doubt, the most difficult determinations involved when creating a potential trail of case-law for patenting essentially biological processes is where to draw the line between a method rendered entirely in a laboratory and the extent to which natural viable processes will then be governed by law. Producers, universities and enthusiastic gardeners and breeders must not be vulnerable to multinational industrial giants who are monopolising designs for naturally-rendered new species.

The EU's 1998 directive does not clearly define the boundaries between classical and modern methods of breeding and does not consider the social, economic or ecological implications. Cultural discrepancies and the social and moral implications of genetic modification and manipulation and the propagation of new life forms for scientific investigation or commercial or agricultural purposes must be heeded and should remain the sovereign prerogative of nation states.

Peter Liese (PPE). – *(DE)* Mr President, if I have been informed correctly, I have been given an extra half a minute because one of our speakers has, unfortunately, not arrived. I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this resolution. These are not merely empty words; I mean them most sincerely. I regret the fact that the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe has not been involved, but I think that it must also accept some of the responsibility for that itself. We requested a debate on this subject a few weeks ago. In the Conference of Presidents, the ALDE Group said that they did not want to discuss the matter. I then took the initiative myself, approached my fellow Members and suggested that we nevertheless talk about this together. If they refuse to cooperate to begin with – I do not know who in the group made the decision – then they cannot complain after the event. We now have to work with what we have on the table.

Patenting is important for innovation. That is something on which we should all agree. There need to be limits, however. Otherwise, innovation will be hampered if the claims go too far, and ethical limits must also be observed, of course. That was the request of the European Parliament when we adopted the directive in 1998. The directive is better than it is reputed to be; it merely needs to be implemented correctly. That applies to plants: Article 4 has been interpreted inconsistently by the European Patent Office. The resolution gives the correct guiding principle for interpreting Article 4.

It applies to other areas, too. It also needs to be clarified once again that deception should not be used in the patent application in order to be successful. Where plants and other biotechnological inventions are concerned, it is often the case that only certain steps in the technical procedure are specified rather than the entire procedure in an attempt to avoid potential exclusion from patentability as laid down in the directive. That has happened in relation to plants and also in connection with other patents, such as in the patenting of embryonic stem cells, concerning which the European Patent Office and the European Court of Justice had to take a decision just recently.

If the European Court of Justice and the European Patent Office implement the directive consistently here, then we should indeed commend them for that. That is the purpose of the amendment – to make it clear that someone cannot obtain a patent in an underhanded manner by deliberately leaving out certain information, but that the directive must be implemented consistently. In some cases, the European Patent Office has not done this. In

other cases, however, it has done so. Therefore, we should not merely criticise, but also express praise where this correct approach has been followed.

Tadeusz Zwiefka (PPE). – *(PL)* Mr President, not long ago in this House, we were discussing the establishment of a common European patent. The last stages of work on its final form are under way, the objective of which has been to make it easier and cheaper to patent an innovation in the European Union's Member States and to give us a guarantee of better protection of intellectual property and European technological ideas.

This course of action is absolutely right, but in taking this course, we must not forget the fact that cases of patenting may occur – although I hope this will not happen – which will hinder the course of development determined by the decisions on establishing the European patent. These questions are particularly addressed by the motion for a resolution tabled by representatives of most of the political groups in Parliament, in which we want to point out to the European Commission certain solutions and interpretations of the provisions contained in the 1998 directive on the protection of private biotechnological inventions which are already being applied both by EU judicial institutions and by agencies of the European Patent Office.

It would appear that the provisions contained in this document have so far caused certain difficulties. Mr Liese has spoken about this and about the different ways in which they have been interpreted. This concerns, in particular, Articles 4, 5 and 6, which speak about areas that are considered unpatentable. Fortunately, recent decisions of the European Court of Justice and the European Patent Office have dispelled these doubts. I personally very much welcome the interpretation applied by these institutions, and I would like here to express the wish and the conviction that the European Commission will take these decisions and this idea into account in its future work and proposals.

Peter Jahr (PPE). – *(DE)* Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased and grateful that we are having this debate on the important issue of patenting of plants and animals today and will also vote on it tomorrow, and I think the broad majority in this House should also dispel the doubts of those who still have them. This is quite simply an important subject that we should not postpone, as we really had a very long discussion process prior to this.

Patenting is important, as my fellow Member said, but there must also be limits. Let me make it clear at the beginning of my speech that a patent on life is unacceptable, and I also reject the patenting of conventionally bred farm animals and crops on principle. This is a clear limit that must not be exceeded.

The situation as it stands is that people are attempting to achieve precisely that by circumventing certain elements in the patenting of technical procedures. We could almost talk of a kind of gold digger mentality when there are several thousand applications that are simply attempting to do all of this. There is a need for action here, and I am pleased – and, in this regard, I do indeed agree with Mr Liese – that we are not only very quickly making it known that there is a need for an amendment to the law, but that we are, of course, also attempting to provide real support for the existing interpretation and for the European Patent Office where it is coming down on the correct side in terms of this interpretation. In other words, I am pleased that we are not only going in all guns blazing, to coin a phrase, but that we also want to intervene in a supportive way.

Thus, we need to be careful, because the diversity of our genetic engineering resources quite simply must not be reduced, and we must not withhold the use of these resources from the general public. With regard to agriculture in particular, it must be ensured that our genetic engineering resources remain available and agricultural production and breeding also continue to be possible.

In this regard, no one would dispute the fact that intellectual property must be adequately protected, but this should be done without restricting access to genetic engineering resources. Most importantly, however, we need to answer the question of how we should distinguish between a patentable technical procedure and a conventional breeding method. The decisive factor in this regard is that it should be a new product based on a new and innovative procedure. We must also rule out the possibility of someone at the same time indirectly including all identical products, genes or genetic engineering properties in the patent by patenting a technical procedure.

This balancing of interests is certainly not an easy task, but it is one that we should take on.

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

Daniel Caspary (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr President, Mr Jahr, you mentioned that this incorrect application of the current directive can also have negative effects on the cultivation of crops or the breeding of livestock. Not being a farmer myself, could you perhaps explain specifically what you mean by that?

Peter Jahr (PPE), *Blue-card answer.* – (DE) Mr President, thank you for your question, Mr Caspary. Until now, farmers have, in principle, been able to utilise genetic potential in their own breeding and propagation; there is a corresponding licensing fee. If plants become more or less patented, the risk is obvious – because in effect, this would result in a reversal of the burden of proof. In other words, if a farmer is found to have such plants, it will be assumed that he has used these patented plants and he will then be prosecuted accordingly under patent law. Eventually, this would result in a few big players using patents to massively restrict genetic diversity and farmers' opportunities for cultivation and propagation. That is what we want to prevent.

Esther de Lange (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, I come from a country where, since the introduction of a handful of tulip bulbs 400 years ago, we have seen the development of hundreds, if not thousands, of different sorts and varieties. European farming and market gardening have grown so big precisely because they constantly keep reinventing themselves by developing new and better varieties all the time. This applies not just to my country, but to all agricultural regions in Europe.

This innovative capacity of European agriculture, of agriculture worldwide, will become ever more relevant. Very soon, we will have 9 billion mouths to feed and we therefore need varieties that, for example, use less water and fewer pesticides and are more resistant to diseases. Our breeders are up to that challenge, but then we need to offer them room for manoeuvre and legal certainty and that is what is missing at the moment.

In relation to plant breeders' rights – and here I am referring, among other things, to the international UPOV Convention, but also Article 4 of the Biopatent Directive – we state that people are allowed to use each other's varieties in breeding, developing and discovering new varieties. We call that breeders' exemption. However, according to patent law, every time you use a variety, you need to obtain the licence from the patent holder.

With the rapid development of patent law in Europe, the breeders' exemption, the developing freedom, is coming under threat and we must not allow that to happen. It is unacceptable from an ethical point of view – as previous Members have already adequately explained – but it is also not economically desirable because, that way, every innovation becomes paralysed. I therefore join my colleagues in calling on the Commission to enshrine the breeders' exemption firmly in European patent law, at least the restricted breeders' exemption, which provides freedom for the whole process until the moment you start commercialising and placing a final product on the market. It is therefore relevant that we get answers, especially to Mr Belder's specific questions, and, if the Commissioner cannot answer them himself, he should have a member of his team answer them in writing.

In the Netherlands, we have already named a tulip after Robert Schuman and I am pleased about that on this Europe Day. We have also named a tulip after Princess Máxima. If the Commission now speeds up the establishment of legal certainty in this field, who knows, Commissioner, that might very well lead to a tulip named after you, a 'tulipa Guchtiniana'. Looking at you now, that would, of course, be a beautiful pink tulip. I sincerely hope that this will be the case.

IN THE CHAIR: RAINER WIELAND

Vice-President

Catch-the-eye procedure

Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, the current interpretation of the existing prohibitions under European patent legislation does not provide the required legal certainty and is not clear enough because patents are being granted for products obtained using conventional methods.

According to information published, for instance, by the North Patterns for Seeds coalition, around 140 patents were granted for plants in 2011, 12 of which were for plants obtained using conventional methods. Again in 2011, 65 patents were granted for animal breeding, at least 10 of which were for conventional methods: sex selection, assisted selection and so on.

We obviously have a legal matter to deal with, which is not yet resolved. The European Parliament must send a strong message. No one claims or can claim ownership of nature. I am against postponing the vote as suggested by some colleagues. The vote must take place as soon as possible.

Phil Bennion (ALDE). – Mr President, some of the debate has been rather emotive, suggesting that we might be opposing this because we are in favour of the patenting of the plants themselves. That is not the case.

This paper is full of errors. Look at paragraph 4, which not only excludes from patenting products derived from conventional breeding, but also seeks to remove from patenting innovations in things like smart breeding. There is also paragraph 7, which talks of a comprehensive breeders' exemption, which is not the case. This depiction of us as supporting the patenting of plants simply does not ring true.

I am speaking as a farmer. I am speaking on behalf of farmers, and I also have experience in plant breeding – which was the subject of my PhD – so I am not speaking from a position of ignorance here.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I will be very brief. I have taken careful note of your concerns and I will certainly refer them to Commissioner Barnier, who is in charge of this file and is much more knowledgeable about it than I am.

Just one word about the next report: developments which have occurred since the last report in 2005, including in Court of Justice case-law, will be addressed in the next report. We will also look into national developments and national case-law. In addition, we will have a closer look at plant-related issues such as the prohibition of patenting essentially biological processes, and the breeders' exception.

President. – To wind up the debate, one motion for a resolution has been tabled by four groups.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 10 May, at 11.30.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Pavel Poc (S&D), *in writing*. – (CS) Directive 98/44/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 July 1998 on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions, and particularly Article 4 thereof, states that plant and animal varieties, and essentially biological processes for the production of plants or animals, shall not be patentable. Despite this, patents have recently been granted by the European Patent Office for the production of conventionally cultivated plants such as broccoli, tomatoes or melons. As a biologist, I completely disagree with the patenting of fundamental biological processes by multinational corporations which jointly dominate the sectors of breeding, agriculture and the food industry, and thus the provision of food for the world's growing population. As a politician, I fully support the European Parliament's request for a consistent implementation of the directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions, and for the Commission and the Member States to ensure that the EU continues, in its patent law, to apply an extensive breeding exemption for the breeding of plants and animals.

Anna Záborská (PPE), *in writing*. – (SK) Our society has reached a stage where we have to think about the underlying philosophy of intellectual property protection. We are witnessing an increasing conflict between private and public interests. On the one hand, a patent, as a temporary monopoly, makes it possible to cover the costs of demanding research and development. Without patent protection, the risk to investors would increase so much that many inventions and improvements would never happen. Their authors would not be able to raise the necessary funding. On the other hand, we see that our patent protection is facing an ethical problem in sectors such as agriculture and health care: we see that the higher prices for patented plants or medicines prevent them from being distributed to places where they would make it possible to save millions of people from poverty, disease and death. This conflict is all the more complex for the fact that the private interest and the effort of the individual to achieve well-being through his own work – including intellectual work – is an integral component of public well-being. In other words, the well-being of society as a whole increases only when the well-being of its members increases. It seems to me that we are not yet ready to propose a fundamental reform to intellectual property protection, whether in terms of patents or copyright. We therefore have no choice but to proceed in small steps. One of these is to differentiate between traditional breeding and modern biotechnologies, as proposed by this Parliament.

22. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

23. One-minute speeches (Rule 150)

President. – The next item is the one-minute speeches on matters of political importance in accordance with Rule 150 of the Rules of Procedure.

Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, the interinstitutional balance is a reference that is bound by the Treaties and declared a fundamental political issue, both by Parliament and by the Commission and the Council.

Mr President, I would like to denounce, as a repeated attitude, the lack of sensitivity on the part of any Commissioner of the European Commission who does not have availability in their schedule to respond to requests for interviews or meetings with MEPs. I will not mention names or specific cases today, but I think that Mr Barroso – who has always set an example of cooperation with Parliament and its MEPs – should send out an unequivocal signal to the College of Commissioners that meetings at the request of MEPs should be a priority and take place frequently. The reasons to protect cooperation and the much talked-about interinstitutional balance are unquestionable, not to mention the due respect that this House deserves.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) Mr President, one of the greatest achievements of the Union's wine reform is the existence of common regulations on protection of origin. However, quality European wines must not be at the mercy of conflicts between states. Several cross-border European wine regions have settled successfully questions concerning wine making procedures and protection of origin, such as the Moselle wine region in French, German and Luxembourg territory. That could be an example to be followed in resolving as soon as possible the debate surrounding the use of the 'Tokaji' name and how such wine is made. That would serve the interests of both Hungarian and Slovakian producers of fine wines. Unfortunately, at present, there is a disagreement between the two countries. The submission of the former socialist Hungarian Government is before the Court of Justice of the European Union, but it would be very welcome if the Slovakian Government, the Hungarian Government and the Commission in Brussels could agree to protect the reputation of the wine of the kings and the king among wines.

Chris Davies (ALDE). – Mr President, each year, Members of this House receive some EUR 50 000 by way of a general expenditure allowance to cover their office costs. The purpose to which that money should be put is clearly stated in the Rules. However, it is paid into the private accounts of Members, there are no audits carried out and no one knows what happens if there is a surplus in those accounts. I am in no doubt at all that many Members simply regard this as pocket money, although it is a huge sum of money well in excess of the average income of most of our citizens, with some of that money probably finding its way into the political parties that we represent. That means it is money going from the public purse with no transparency at all.

Parliament has called for transparency; Parliament has called for the Secretary-General to bring forward recommendations for new procedures. This is a scandal waiting to happen. I ask you, Mr President, to put pressure on the Secretary-General to do what Parliament has requested of him, and to bring forward procedures to ensure that this money is spent entirely transparently.

Nikos Chrysogelos (Verts/ALE). – (EL) Mr President, today's European Union rose from the ashes of two world wars and serves as an example of how a peaceful world can be constructed, thanks to the courage and vision demonstrated by its founders. Today, however, we again need the same sort of courage and vision if Europe is to win over the heads and hearts of its citizens.

The euro needs to be a symbol of unity and cohesion, not a tool to divide and rule. The approach to fiscal problems needs to be based on socially fair measures. Europe must invest resources in employment, innovation and the green social contract, rather than merely evincing an interest in saving the banks and repaying debts.

The policies applied today to deal with the Greek crisis have failed because they cause poverty, unemployment and recession and destroy the real economy. The Greek elections illustrated that, in order to prevent anti-Europe parties from gaining ground, we also need to consistently defend European values and the European social model in the countries gripped by the crisis. The success of such a policy is in the interests of both Greece and the other Member States.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR). – Mr President, last year, sugar prices hit a 30-year high. The EU is facing a sugar shortage in spite of a global sugar surplus.

These shortages are unnecessary and the Commission is to blame. Because of the mismanagement of the sugar regime, cane sugar refineries across Europe are under threat. These refineries provide more than 4 500 jobs in some of the poorest parts of the EU.

Cane refineries are being forced to pay a higher price for their raw materials than their competitors. The Commission must ensure a level playing field to protect jobs. The Commission must include sugar cane in its strategy in order to address this artificial shortage.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL). – (ES) Mr President, I hope that the Commission and the Council have taken note of the results of the French presidential elections and the Greek elections because they have become a real challenge to the economic orientation of the European Union. That is how it is perceived by a significant proportion of voters in the EU who do not understand how, at this time, the European Union is literally leading them to ruin, that is, to welfare values from the 1930s or 1940s.

I therefore believe that this is the time, ladies and gentlemen, to urge the EU institutions to properly correct this economic orientation. It is unsustainable to have a single currency without a public treasury; it is unsustainable that the European Central Bank cannot control it; all that market deregulation entails is unsustainable and it is unsustainable that the European Union does not have strong instruments to intervene in the economy and to stimulate the economy in the face of the Stability Pact.

Andrey Kovatchev (PPE). – (BG) Mr President, I would like to express my concern regarding the situation in the Republic of Macedonia. On the one hand, after the horrific murder of five young people, we are again seeing a rise in the ethnic tension that we thought had been brought under control 10 years after the signing of the Ohrid Agreement. The state authorities must do their job, regardless of the ethnic origin and religious denomination of the victims and perpetrators. This is very important for the stability of both the Republic of Macedonia and the region. On the other hand, the completely senseless provocations, especially in the context described above, against Bulgaria and Bulgarians are continuing. A fresh example is the incident that occurred in Skopje during the tribute to the Bulgarian

revolutionary and officer, Gotse Delchev. Despite being promptly notified by the Bulgarian embassy, law-enforcement officers did not prevent this anti-Bulgarian act of hooliganism, and the Bulgarian ambassador was hindered from laying flowers in honour of the historical hero common to both countries.

In the last few resolutions regarding Macedonia, our Parliament has repeatedly called for joint celebrations of shared historical events and heroes as a step towards reconciliation and overcoming historical injustices. I believe that the only way forward for the Republic of Macedonia is European integration. I hope – for the sake of Macedonian citizens' prosperity and security – that the state authorities will take heed of our recommendations and accept the outstretched hand.

Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE). – Mr President, I would like to address the alarming political developments in Russia and Ukraine. Much to our regret, the attempts to reach democracy in both countries have encountered very serious setbacks. The violent crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy demonstrations in Moscow, relating to the inauguration of President Putin, and the ongoing politically motivated persecution of Yulia Tymoshenko in Ukraine are the actions of non-democratic regimes. Putin is behaving like a self-proclaimed tsar, beating and arresting protesters who might cast a shadow over his crowning celebrations, and Yanukovych has turned to medieval practices of torturing political opponents.

The European Parliament must take resolute action and condemn these grave human rights violations. We have been too patient with our Eastern neighbours, but their empty promises have exhausted themselves. Further, targeted sanctions are needed to clarify our value-based policies.

Ana Miranda (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Mr President, today is Europe Day; it is the day of solidarity. Europe shows solidarity when it also provides health and social cover to the weakest members of society. The crisis and the austerity measures are once again being used as the perfect alibi to demonstrate the hypocrisy of governments that undermine equality, for example, in access to health services.

I want to warn of the serious situation that is arising in Spain due to the withdrawal of the health insurance card for illegal immigrants, an example of social exclusion and a lack of respect for human rights. When providing health care, distinguishing between legal and illegal immigrants and differentiating between races is discrimination and violates human rights. To neglect the most disadvantaged who, for example, need dialysis or treatment for cancer or AIDS is discrimination.

Guaranteeing the health of the most vulnerable people must be a right that dignifies Europe and any limitation of this is a limitation of rights.

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL) . – (EL) Mr President, the anti-fascist victory of the people in May 1945 was made possible thanks to endless sacrifice by the Soviet people and the heroic fight of the anti-Stasi movements led by the communists. The imperialist European Union chose the date of the anti-fascist victory as 'Europe Day' in a bid to wipe the slate clean of the lesson that, if they wish, the people can crush their apparently invincible opponent, in order to hide the fact that nazism was born of the exploitative capitalist system.

Unfortunately, the undocumented effort to equate communism with fascism is official policy of the EU and the bourgeois governments. EU Member States have restored the SS,

restored the swastika and are persecuting communists. This and the barbaric measures being taken against workers and immigrants and imperialist interventions are again feeding organisations which hanker after fascism and nazism.

Kinga Gál (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, as the former chair and current vice-chair of the European Parliament's Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, I find it outrageous and unacceptable that the first measure taken by a newly formed left-liberal government is to withdraw rights granted to national minorities, and I wish to call your attention to that fact. It is unacceptable that the new Romanian socialist-liberal government is immediately withdrawing the right to a legally established, independent Hungarian faculty at the medical university in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), a right finally granted after the Hungarian minority of 1.5 million people had pressed for it for years. It is unacceptable that, for the first time since the change of regime, not a word is mentioned about national minorities in the government's manifesto, and the liberal leader of the government declares minority rights as excessive prerogatives. I ask the leaders of the socialist and liberal groups, who fight for these rights so visibly and so vocally, including in many cases of imagined violations, what action are they now taking against real violations taking place within their own party families?

Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, thanks to its new government, Romania is finally on the right path, the path to economic recovery, to having a government that is closer to the people, a transparent government which will correct many of the mistakes made by the previous government.

The Ponta government offers Romania real hope and Romanian citizens an escape route from poverty and unemployment, because this government wants to provide sustainable economic growth and raise the standard of living. From now on, government initiatives and measures will be based on political, social and economic dialogue. Society will no longer be ignored, but be consulted about the policies due to be implemented.

In fact, in this regard, I am delighted that health reform will be carried out on the basis of broad consultation with ordinary citizens, all the professional organisations and civil society as a whole. This approach is in stark contrast to that adopted by the previous government, which caused major social and political tensions as a result of the unsuccessful health bill tabled in December 2011.

I hope that the new government will enjoy your support so that it can restore a sense of dignity among Romanians about living in their country and in Europe.

Paul Murphy (GUE/NGL). – Mr President, since the brutal massacre of oil workers and their supporters in Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan, in December last year, the human rights situation has worsened even further.

Brutal repression and intimidation are being used against anybody who speaks out against the farcical show-trials of the 37 people supposedly responsible for the tragic events in Zhanaozen, and indeed anybody who speaks out against the authoritarian Nazarbayev regime. On the morning of 28 April 2012, activists Larisa Boyar, Baxatjan Toregozhina and Kanat Ibragimov were arrested before participating in a protest, and were jailed for 15 days. On the night of 19 April, the freelance journalist Lukpan Akhmedyaroy was brutally attacked by five people and stabbed eight times.

Despite this ferocious oppression, the genie seems to be out of the bottle in Kazakhstan, and the opposition and discontent of the working class cannot be silenced. This is seen in

the victorious strike of thousands of workers in the copper-mining company in Zhezkazgan. This important victory shows the potential power of the working class. I support the struggle of the workers there to ensure that concessions are granted.

Ramon Tremosa i Balcells (ALDE). – Mr President, Bankia will be nationalised this week by the Spanish central government and EUR 10 billion of public money will be used to bail out this bank.

Spain's Prime Minister, Mr Rajoy, has, for many months, repeatedly denied that this would happen in Spain and has refused to bail out some Catalan saving banks such as CatalunyaCaixa and Unnim. However, Madrid's Bankia will be saved with public money despite its bad management and its close involvement with the bursting of the housing bubble in Spain.

This is happening at precisely the same moment as regions are being obliged to cut EUR 10 billion in education and health. The Spanish Government will cut transfers to regions in order to cut basic social services and save a bank that has failed. The Commission should examine this nationalisation carefully. No discrimination between citizens should be tolerated in EU countries.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, in little over two weeks, the Irish people will go to the polls to vote on the Fiscal Stability Treaty. This is something that all euro area countries and eight others outside the euro area are doing without a referendum.

The Treaty makes sense, and I hope that the Irish people will take the opportunity to impose what we call in Irish 'smacht' – discipline – on politicians and political parties, so that they will never again be able to buy elections, or draw down huge debts which future generations are lumbered with repaying. Other countries outside the European Union such as Canada are doing something similar.

Also on this Schuman Day – since Schuman spoke about solidarity in deeds – I would also hope that we could add an appendix to the Fiscal Treaty by engaging in some form of stimulus. I would ask the bigger countries in particular to help do that by helping us to achieve growth and jobs, as well as a Treaty that would benefit everybody in Europe, and in the euro area in particular.

Antigoni Papadopoulou (S&D). – (EL) Mr President, today we are celebrating Europe Day. However, just a few weeks ago, before the Republic of Cyprus took over the Presidency of the European Council, occupying Turkish forces were still causing provocation in Cyprus and seriously undermining the climate in our geostrategic area as a whole. They ignored everyone and illegally issued permits for exploratory drilling in the sea between Cyprus and Greece and illegal drilling for oil in the occupied part of Cyprus.

I roundly condemn this new provocation by Turkey, a candidate country. I call on you to protect the dignity of the European Union itself, the unity of the Republic of Cyprus and peace in the area. I call on the European Union to put pressure on Turkey to stop this provocation and, if it does not, to impose strict sanctions on it. Turkish expansionism is putting the European legal order at risk. We must react.

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, there has been a change of government in Romania. After the no-confidence motion of the opposition parties was voted through, a social democratic politician has been able to form a government. The main topic of the no-confidence motion was the establishment of an independent Hungarian-language

medical university as guaranteed by law. In other words, the centre-right cabinet fell because of granting a right that is set down in a national minority law. In the manifesto of the new government, for the first time since the change of regime, the Hungarian minority does not get a single mention. This government is not even willing to acknowledge the existence of our community of 1.5 million people. These tendencies point in an extremely negative direction at a time when Romanian citizens are also suffering greatly from the effects of the economic crisis. I would warn the Romanian political class, especially the leaders of the parties that have now come to power, against trying to divert attention from the country's problems by attacks against the Hungarian minority at this time of crisis.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, every year on Europe Day, we recall how the joint construction of the European Project was started.

This year, we can talk about a new beginning with greater hope and confidence. The wave of political changes in the last few weeks indicates that Europeans are no longer accepting austerity. Austerity has resulted in two major consequences: poverty and despair. This period must come to an end.

Europe needs strategies for promoting growth, action to right the wrongs of recent years, as well as positive measures for creating jobs and supporting the vulnerable sections of society. Although many Europeans are experiencing hardship and face huge difficulties every day, we can now talk about renewed confidence in a fairer future, built by leaders who respect their citizens and make decisions for their benefit.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, on 9 May 1950, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, formally called the democratic countries of Europe to seek mutual cooperation to ensure that the drama of World War II would not be repeated in the future. This day is generally regarded as the beginning of a united Europe. The reconciliatory nature of the declaration towards Germany and its openness to the participation of other European countries set new standards of political life in Europe.

Today, 62 years on, the Schuman Declaration continues to be as relevant as ever. However, in relation to the economic crisis which has hit Europe, we are increasingly seeing the worrying phenomenon of local revivals of nationalisms and the growth of racism and xenophobia in our continent. This is accompanied by a significant loss of confidence in relation to the European Union and the idea of integration. The Union itself is currently struggling with the greatest crisis of identity in its history. What, then, will be the future of Europe?

Alexander Mirsky (S&D). – Mr President, today we celebrate the day of victory over Nazism, but in Latvia, there are other heroes. I have spoken in Parliament many times about the day of commemoration in Latvia of the establishment of the Latvian Waffen SS. It seems that no one listened to me. However, today this idea of the glorification of Nazism continues in Latvia. You can buy this calendar for the year 2012 openly in Latvian shops. Nobody cares that the heroes of these posters are military criminals. We must put a stop to these days when the Latvian Waffen SS is commemorated.

I would like to present this calendar personally to the President.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, today, the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, mentioned the quiet revolution that started 60 years ago, as well as a Europe without walls and wars.

If there is one invention which has contributed more to enabling peoples to understand each other, values to be understood and shared, differences between peoples to be absorbed, and us to understand each other and get to know each other better, it is the Internet.

We are going to vote shortly in Parliament on ACTA. I call on my fellow Members from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and, in particular, Romanian MEPs from the Liberal Democratic Party, to state publicly whether they are going to vote for ACTA or against this agreement, because it is the European Union's very existence at stake, and the values which we believe in and support.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, while Europe Day is an occasion for celebration, it also offers us an excellent opportunity to take stock of the steps that we still have to take to create an ever-deeper union between Europe's peoples, where decisions are made with complete respect for the principle of transparency and as close to citizens as possible.

Today, we must look to the future. It is our duty not only to instil in young people the same ideals which Robert Schuman had in the 1950s, but, in particular, to provide the conditions they need to contribute themselves to the development of the society in which they live, at least just as much as previous generations have done. I think that we are duty-bound to invest in education, health, research and innovation and, above all, in the European Union's industrial policy. This is the only way in which we can help young people enhance their skills and become more enterprising, and enable them to find a decent, secure, well-paid job, matching the qualifications each of them has.

Emer Costello (S&D). – Mr President, the forthcoming UEFA Euro 2012 championship in Poland and Ukraine will provide an opportunity to celebrate football across Europe, and I speak as a proud Irishwoman whose national team has qualified for this event. Unfortunately, however, there will be a darker side, as there is evidence to suggest that such events can lead to an increase in prostitution and trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. Prostitution is something of a grey area in both Poland and Ukraine, being neither fully legal nor illegal.

With just weeks to go until the championship, I am calling on the Commission to work with UEFA to initiate a Europe-wide campaign, during the championship, which would, first and foremost, educate the population at large about the problem of forced prostitution and human trafficking; secondly, seek to curb demand by raising awareness among potential clients; and also provide information and assistance to those at risk of being trafficked into prostitution during this time.

Prostitution is not a lifestyle choice. It is time to debunk the idea of the happy hooker. Indeed, women who are involved in prostitution will testify that they have had very few choices in life.

Corina Crețu (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, as has been mentioned in this Chamber, we are celebrating Europe Day today in a European Union split between hope and delusion. In light of this, the election of François Hollande on Sunday as President of France and the inauguration on Monday of the social democratic leader, Victor Ponta, as prime minister of the new Romanian Government are important steps towards the progressive left taking responsibility for giving the European project a future again.

In addition to this, these changes restore hope and belief in a Europe in crisis, where changes of government are taking place under the pressure of popular discontent, and poverty is

spreading and the demons of the past are returning with a vengeance: xenophobia, anti-semitism, extremism, nationalism and protectionism. Greece is just one example of Europe's failure, originating from a decline in its economic integration.

I hope that the new trends in political support will trigger a process for rethinking and deepening the European project, including through defending democracy, reaffirming the social model and narrowing the disparities between Member States.

Phil Prendergast (S&D). – Mr President, in the process of switching over from analogue to digital TV transmission in Ireland, a number of isolated regions in rural Cork, Kerry, Tipperary, Waterford and Limerick will be blacked out by the so-called free digital television service Saorview, according to current coverage planning. These coverage gaps punish rural and isolated areas and compound their disadvantaged situation.

Almost 100 000 people will need to pay up to EUR 200 in special satellite equipment that can cost a further EUR 400 to be installed – according to some quotes. I believe this raises questions in terms of compliance with EU law, and I will question the Commission in that regard. The provision of TV reception is a service of general interest subject to universal provision obligations regardless of location. All Irish families should be covered. Rural Ireland must not have its back broken by extortionate rates for a service previously enjoyed for free.

President. – That concludes this item.

24. Regional airports and air services (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report by Philip Bradbourn, on behalf of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, on the future of regional airports and air services in the EU (2011/2196(INI)) (A7-0094/2012).

Philip Bradbourn, rapporteur. – Mr President, I am delighted to present my own-initiative report on the future of regional airports and air services in the EU. This report is born out of the need to recognise the important role that regional air services play for European citizens and in our economy. It also reflects the tendency of the Commission and others to neglect the opportunities that they provide. The report acknowledges that regional air services have an integral role in the economic well-being of the EU and are vital to the financial and social vibrancy of the regions.

Europe's airports provide a large network of 150 000 city pairs. They are essential to facilitating the smooth running of the single market by transporting people and goods between key parts of Member States. They are essential generators of economic growth by expanding trade beyond traditional partnerships, boosting the economies of regions they serve and often connecting inaccessible regions and islands to the broader economy, thus allowing their continued viability.

Aviation, however, is an industry with small margins and this is especially true at the regional level. The financial and sovereign debt crisis has substantially changed the conditions for financing regional airports. This must be counteracted by the removal of economic barriers and a better definition of their role in the transport network. Indeed, I strongly believe that regional airports need to be seen as an integral part of the trans-European network, rather than somewhere away on the periphery.

By bringing regional airports closer into the transport network, we can provide more of an incentive for industry to better integrate across modes and develop benefits for our citizens, for example, via multimodal ticketing, as cited in the report.

The report calls on the Commission to speed up the development of SESAR and the Single European Sky as a matter of urgency. These programmes will bring environmental and economic savings. As well as this, regional airports, which are running well below capacity, can have a role to play in alleviating the capacity crunch that a number of major airports are suffering. If implemented properly, encouraging region-to-region services could lead to less congestion and greater environmental efficiency. Similarly, when considering the upcoming airports package, I call on the Commission to pay particular attention to the regions, as currently they risk being priced out of the market, leaving greater consolidation between major airports and airlines, with the result being less choice and higher prices.

The report also aims to tackle the practices of certain airlines on two main subjects: price transparency and onboard baggage. It is the practice of some carriers to add charges to the headline price of a ticket. This report calls for companies to offer all passengers a method of credit or debit card payment that is free and to include any unavoidable administration fees in the headline price. It is important that people know what they will be paying, and not find the cost of their ticket ratcheted up through the entire process.

With regard to onboard baggage, the report calls for the industry to set common upper limits for weight and size restrictions. This again is so that consumers know what to expect when travelling. The report also calls for airside purchases to be treated as separate to the 'one bag' rule. The strict application of this so-called 'one bag' rule as it stands is used as a tool, in some cases, to increase profits to the detriment of consumers. The current practice is particularly harmful at regional airports, which often heavily reduce fees to carriers on the basis of passenger throughput, making these up in retail sales.

I strongly believe that regional airports and air services have a role to play in reinvigorating our economy as part of a well functioning transport network. Therefore, I call on the Commission to listen to what we are saying in Parliament. The Commission must be bold and take action for the benefit of consumers, the travelling public and the many businesses that flourish by having access to airports and air services.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, I would agree with most of the points made by the rapporteur, and I compliment him on his initiative. Regional airports certainly have a key part to play in the overall transport network, and I would agree with him that this should be included in the TEN-T network.

We also need to look at the points regarding the 'one bag' rule, which is obviously especially detrimental, as he said, to small airports. At the heels of the hunt, however, it is important that regional airports are economically viable. We also have to look at the situation of regional airports which were established prior to major waterways being built, or to the advent of high-speed rail, making some of them now uneconomic and possibly unnecessary. It is very important that we take an overall view so as to keep the ones that are necessary, to build them up and help them in every way. But if some have become unnecessary, then there is no point in pouring good money after bad simply to keep them ticking over.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, regional aviation is a key enabler in citizens' mobility. Regional airports make a vital contribution to territorial cohesion and

social and economic development in the regions, especially in regions without any other forms of transport. Better connectivity and efficient intermodal mobility can contribute considerably to providing better access to regions, and to the development of their economy and tourism.

Unfortunately, regional airports located away from urban centres are often poorly connected to the transport network on the ground. We encourage local and regional authorities to submit plans for sustainable mobility, providing an efficient logistics chain. We propose an exchange of good practices on connections between regional airports and urban centres. We call on the Commission to take a balanced approach in future revisions of the guidelines in order to provide for a socially and economically viable development of regional air services, taking into consideration the development of the infrastructure needed to ensure intermodality.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, regional airports and aviation, if properly integrated in comprehensive regional development policies with a view to taking full advantage of the intrinsic potential of the regions in which they are located, can be an important instrument for supporting that development, by helping to tackle regional disparities. This requires good links with other modes of transport, such as rail or maritime transport, thereby establishing conditions for the mobility of people and goods that take account of essential criteria of environmental sustainability.

However, the development of these services in line with the rationale that the public interest should take precedence is not compatible with the ongoing process of deregulation in the sector, or with the free-market dogma that steers the Single European Sky project and subordinates necessary state intervention and regulation to the hallowed free market-place, even where safety issues are concerned.

I should like to say a brief word on the worrying deterioration of working conditions in the sector. The ongoing deregulation has made social dumping easier for the multinationals in this sector, forcing job insecurity and levelling working conditions down. In this regard, the role played by low-cost airlines is undeniable

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, due to the fact that Europe is relatively densely populated and has a relatively advanced level of technology in relation to industrial production, a great many airports have been built in Europe which vary substantially in terms of size and the structure of services provided. Along with the large international airports, passenger and cargo transport is also provided by smaller airports of regional significance, whose activities provide important support in terms of transport to the towns and regions they serve. In the integrated area of the EU in particular, with the mobility of the population reaching new levels, well-organised air transport is becoming a major factor improving the comfort and speed of travel. It is therefore right to substantively address the specifics of regional airports, which operate under a very different regime from that of the large hubs on which most European legislation is focused. The operational specifics of regional aviation must be properly reflected in EU regulations in order to ensure that they work well, just as Mr Bradbourn proposes.

Hubert Pirker (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, with this report, the European Parliament points out the particular significance of regional airports, both as transport hubs and as an essential generator of economic growth in the region and for the Union as a whole.

I would like to particularly highlight three points that would strengthen these regional airports. Firstly, connections with other modes of transport and with the international transport hubs must be improved; secondly, regional airports must try to form better and stronger networks with each other; and thirdly, they can be used as alternative airports where there are capacity bottlenecks at hub airports. What is also clear is that we must not allow these regional airports to be established as monuments to local politicians, but that obviously the figures must add up in the medium term. There must be a focus on efficiency and economic viability.

May I conclude by thanking the rapporteur, Philip Bradbourn, for his constructive cooperation.

Phil Prendergast (S&D). – Mr President, the four regional airports in my constituency – Waterford, Shannon, Cork and Kerry Airports – would, I believe, benefit from many of the ideas contained in this report. I congratulate the author and I particularly welcome the proposals in relation to the ‘one bag’ rule, as cited by my colleague, Sean Kelly, MEP. This rule benefits the airlines. However, the benefit is to the detriment of the airport itself as many regional airports depend on retail and food sales to survive. The business model is threatened when passengers are limited to one bag as it prevents them from making purchases at the airport. The Spanish ban on this ‘one bag’ rule should be adopted across the 27 Member States.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight today’s decision by the Irish Government to split Shannon Airport from the DAA. I hope the future plans for this airport will focus on the airport’s potential to attract investment and to create long-term jobs in the mid-west region. It is very much needed.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, I welcome the Bradbourn report, at least for the following reasons.

Firstly, there is the call made to the Commission to review the directive which led to a reduction in the threshold at which an airport can receive State aid. An airport can become cost-effective when the traffic level exceeds 500 000 passengers per year. This is why the level at which State aid can be granted in a simplified scheme needs to be reviewed.

Secondly, the provisions featuring in the report on the ‘one bag’ policy and airport security are also important.

As regards including more regional airports in the trans-European transport network, this could generate greater mobility in many regions, thereby boosting economic growth.

However, I do have considerable reservations about the provision in Recital A concerning airports whose main catchment area is a capital city. Provided that these airports meet other criteria that define regional airports, they must benefit from the same economic and legislative conditions.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, I welcome Mr Bradbourn’s report on the future of regional airports and air services in the EU. It complements the Commission’s airport package initiative presented in December last year very well. This aims at ensuring that airports do not become the bottleneck in the success story that is the Single European Sky.

Passengers, airlines and also European regions have benefited considerably from the single market in aviation, thanks to which the number of inter-EU routes has doubled over 20 years. Airports are fed with traffic from the regional airports, connecting our citizens with the world. Point-to-point carriers have changed the landscape of regional airports. Charter airlines are linked with major tourist destinations. Business aviation is the centre of our business connectivity in Europe. We have a vibrant aviation sector which provides growth for the whole continent, including the regions.

I will now comment on the main policy areas highlighted in the Bradbourn Report. The relevant Commission DGs are currently looking at the revision of State-aid guidelines on the financing of regional airports and start-up aid to airlines. The role of regional airports in territorial cohesion and in interconnecting EU regions and countries must remain a guiding principle of the review of the compatibility conditions, but we cannot ignore the fact that unlawful public subsidies distort competition at several levels between airlines and between airports. We need to agree on common and simple rules on a matter that affects the sustainability of the EU aviation market. Your report will certainly be taken into account in the ongoing review.

Some airlines restrict the number of pieces of hand luggage carried on board by imposing the so-called 'one bag' rule on passengers. Passengers seem to be confused by varying strictness in the application of such policies by ground staff. The Commission will study luggage allowances in the context of the ongoing impact assessment on revision of the Air Passenger Rights Regulation No 261/2004. The Commission has launched a public consultation which provides an opportunity for interested parties to contribute. Regarding the impact on retail sales in airports, this is mainly a question of business-to-business relations between airlines, airports and retailers. If there are competition issues, these should be addressed, but not via legislation designed to protect passengers.

The report expresses concerns regarding the proposed revision of the Slot Regulation. I want to reassure you, on behalf of Commissioner Kallas, that the objective is certainly not to price regional air services out of the market but to ensure more efficient use of existing airport capacity. In preparing the legislation, the Commission has discounted options such as slot confiscation and slot auctioning precisely because of their negative impact on regional air services. Discussions on this proposal are now ongoing in the Council and in Parliament.

Intermodality is at the heart of our transport policy. The report calls for regional airports to be taken into account in the future trans-European transport network policy. Ensuring these airports are properly connected to the whole transport network is at the heart of the TEN-T policy, but we need to go beyond infrastructure. We need the technology and innovative services and we will continue working on integrated ticketing, the concept of a pan-European multi-modal planning, ticketing and billing system for passenger transport. I thank Parliament for its continued interest and support.

The Commission is aware of the practice of certain airlines of adding a number of charges onto the headline price of air tickets. The report mentions charges for the use of debit or credit cards, which are now widely applied. The Commission will shortly publish a study on air ticket price transparency provisions in EU law. Some airlines impose fees which vary by payment type. Although, in all cases, a free means of payment is offered, this may not be readily available to the majority of customers. We will have to discuss this issue with Member State authorities to see what can or cannot be allowed under existing legislation.

Airports are important as our gates to Europe and to the world and they are also important growth engines. We all come from different regions of Europe and we all know how important airports can be for the connectivity of a remote region. They are essential for European connectivity.

Let me conclude by thanking you for an interesting debate on this very important topic. The Commission is looking forward to further follow-up in the context of the discussions on the airport package.

President. – The debate is closed.

May I point out that an erratum has been submitted for Mr Bradbourn's report that affects recital F in all the language versions.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 10 May, at 11.30.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Salvatore Iacolino (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The tendency shown by the European Commission to focus attention on major hub airports is in complete contrast with the need for connection of areas such as islands and outermost regions, which need full accessibility and territorial integration due to their physical and natural characteristics. Equally, it is important for the European Commission to review Decision 2012/21/EU on the application of Article 106, in order to better understand the vital importance of the impact of these investments on territorial cohesion and social and economic development, especially in regions where other forms of transport are lacking. Furthermore, EU cofinancing by the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), cohesion and regional funds would allow regional airports to play a leading role in the creation of a wider European Common Aviation Area and therefore, during its review of the TEN-T, the Commission needs to recognise the vital link between regional air services and economic regeneration. I therefore remain convinced that future trans-European network policy must guarantee the mobility of people and goods and make regions, including peripheral regions, more attractive, as a practical contribution to revitalising investments and employment in the Single European Market.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) Air transport plays a key role in the economic growth of regions and in creating new jobs, especially where this involves less developed regions, regions located at the European Union's external borders and the outermost regions. We all acknowledge the particular importance of these airports, not only from an economic and social perspective, but also in terms of the environment. However, the real problem seems to arise when it comes to obtaining funding.

This is precisely why I think that, for the forthcoming programming period, we must most definitely include regional airports as a matter of course on the list of beneficiaries eligible to apply for EU funding or resources from other financial engineering instruments funded by the EU. This means that building or modernising regional airports will make the regions significantly more appealing, with the direct upshot of attracting investors and tourists to the region and, by extension, of contributing to their development.

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) I think a well-developed network of regional airports and related services will definitely be a source of economic growth throughout the European Union. In the amendments I submitted to the Committee on Transport and Tourism, I tried from the very outset to emphasise that regional airports

have a double use as part of the Single European Sky. I mean that firstly, they are a convenient network of connections between regions with a smaller population which are distant from each other and which must not be marginalised. Secondly, in relation to the growing numbers of new connections as well as of flights on existing routes, a well-developed airport network gives rise to many dangers. Therefore, regional airports can also be an efficient network of emergency airports. This can be seen, for example, by looking at last year's problems after the eruption of the volcano in Iceland. In relation to profitability, establishing such a network is certainly a rather important question, so incorporating some airports into the TEN-T core network will make it easier to arrange cofinancing for them. In summary, I would like to point out that restoring stability and thereby competitiveness to the transport market should be at the basis of the regional airport network to be established.

Vilja Savisaar-Toomast (ALDE), *in writing.* – (ET) Regional airports are important from several points of view. First, they guarantee the functioning of passenger and goods transport between regions. Second, they are creators of regional economic growth. Examining these two aspects together, one can see that regional airports are infrastructure entities of regional and subnational importance, which offer not only flight connections, but also much broader opportunities to stimulate the economy. Here, it is undoubtedly worth noting the influence of these airports on the regional tourism and service sector.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of this report, given that there are more than two hundred regional airports in Europe, which, for many regions, are the most important access opportunities for connecting them. I strongly support the continuation of state assistance for smaller airports, especially in regions in which air service is the only connection. I also concur with the rapporteur that the independence of regional airports should be safeguarded, the aggressive behaviour of monopolistic airline companies should be restrained and the quality of the service offered to passengers should be guaranteed. I believe that regional airports should also be taken into consideration in the future trans-European transport network policy and in the elaboration of the overall regional and cohesion policy. At the same time, I would like to emphasise that in the case of TEN-T, projects allocated to future periods should not alter the deadlines and volumes for the implementation of current projects that have already been agreed upon.

Monika Smolková (S&D), *in writing.* – (SK) Surely no one doubts the importance of regional airport services. Many of us use their services every week when travelling to the European Parliament. As well as securing mobility for a large number of people, they contribute to the spread of tourism and to the economic growth of the regions concerned. In a time of financial and economic crisis, it is important that the large airlines do not create a monopoly and squeeze regional airports out of the market. A monopoly in aviation would lead to higher prices for cargo services and other disadvantageous and restrictive travel conditions for passengers. A smoothly functioning EU single market requires regional airports and air services for the transportation of people and goods and the development of remote towns and regions. In drawing up the next aviation package, the Commission should therefore take account of the need to maintain and support regional airports.

Valdemar Tomaševski (ECR), *in writing.* – (PL) Regional aviation, as is the case with other means of transport, is one of the most important factors which enable citizens to be mobile. For this reason, regional aviation and support for building regional airports, particularly where the population is spread over a wide area, should be made a priority for EU strategy and EU support. Increasing the number of connections and the mobility of

citizens can significantly extend inter-regional contacts, influence the development of tourism and stimulate the economic development of the EU's outermost regions.

Air connections foster the faster movement of people and goods, which means that promoting regional aviation is certain to help stimulate regional economies and develop related services. This is very important during the economic crisis in which Europe finds itself today. We are in the 21st century, we are building a modern Europe, and we must not allow the existence of regions which are deprived of regional airports. Such regions do, unfortunately, still exist, in Central and Eastern Europe for example. For this reason, the Union should consider giving financial support to administrative authorities which, on their own, do not have the means to build local airports and join the network of regional aviation carriers. Local airports should receive the right support, not just from national authorities, but should be entitled to receive money from EU funds, and the European Commission should treat this matter as one of the most important in the new strategic programming framework. The goal should be obvious – sustainable territorial development of the regions.

25. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

26. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting closed at 22.00)