

MONDAY, 11 JUNE 2012

IN THE CHAIR: MARTIN SCHULZ

President

(The sitting opened at 17.00)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Thursday, 24 May 2012.

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

3. Welcome

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome the delegation in the gallery from the United States Congress: Cliff Stearns, the co-Chair of the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue, and his seven colleagues.

Welcome, dear colleagues, it is a pleasure to see you in the European Parliament!

(Applause)

These ladies and gentlemen from the United States Congress, who are visiting us as part of the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD), participated in the meeting of the TLD in Copenhagen on Saturday and Sunday together with Members of this House's Delegation for relations with the United States, and this evening they will take part in a special meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, thus concluding their work.

4. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

5. Composition of political groups: see Minutes

6. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

7. Verification of credentials: see Minutes

8. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

9. Signature of acts adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure: see Minutes

10. Announcement by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, last Thursday, following a brief debate, the Justice and Home Affairs Council agreed on an approach to what is known as the Schengen evaluation mechanism. That is the legislative procedure overseen in this House by Mr Coelho, as rapporteur. At the same time, the decision has provoked very intense reactions from all the groups in this House. I have been asked by pretty much all the groups in this House to pay attention to this matter. As you know, what we are dealing with here is a unilateral change to the legal basis, from Article 77 of the EU Treaty to Article 70. The

subject matter is the exclusion of the European Parliament from further legislative procedures. For that reason, the Conference of Presidents – acting on behalf of the whole House – has asked the Danish Presidency for a debate at 09.00 tomorrow morning on the legal basis for the Schengen evaluation mechanism.

The Danish Minister for Justice, Morten Bødskov, will make a statement on behalf of the Council, after which all the group chairs will speak. On behalf of the Conference of Presidents, I called Mr Bødskov, as well as the current President-in-Office, Danish Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, and told them that the European Parliament will vigorously reject any attempt to take an axe to the fundamental freedoms of the citizens of the European Union. The European Council's actions are completely unacceptable to the European Parliament. This evening, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs will be discussing the matter, and the outcome of the Committee's deliberations will certainly have a crucial role in the debate tomorrow morning.

I would also like to inform Members of the following. I sent a letter on this House's behalf to the newly elected Serbian President, Tomislav Nikolić, congratulating him on his election. Whilst congratulating him, I also pointed out that attempts to re-write history are neither acceptable nor purposeful, especially given that it is internationally accepted – by, for example, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia – that a genocide, a crime against humanity, took place at Srebrenica. We should remind President Nikolić that Serbia's future is in Europe. We all share the hope that Serbia does not stray from the path to regional reconciliation, otherwise, it would be leaving the path to Europe. The President of the Republic of Serbia is well advised not to stray from that path.

(Applause)

On opening our plenary session today, I would like to draw your attention to the worrying situations of two of the winners of our Sakharov Prize. Ms Leyla Zana, who I met during my official visit to Turkey two weeks ago, thanked me for the European Parliament's steadfast support and asked me to pass on her thanks to you all. Ms Zana has been convicted under Turkey's anti-terrorism laws. Irrespective of the subject matter, we demand a fair trial. The European Parliament will be following the appeal proceedings concerning Ms Zana with great interest. I have made that absolutely clear to the Turkish authorities.

(Applause)

Turkey is a signatory to the European Convention on Human Rights, and we expect it to adhere to the convention. Respecting freedom of opinion and of the press is even more important if Turkey wants to live up to its billing as a role model for the countries of the Arab Spring. Turkey must expect to be judged on the claims that it makes for itself internationally.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am equally shocked by the situation of another of our Sakharov laureates, Asmaa Mahfouz. She is threatened with imprisonment, and the appeal proceedings are due to begin on 17 June. In a letter to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Baroness Ashton, I requested that the Head of our Delegation in Cairo be present in person at the opening of the proceedings. Ladies and gentlemen, perhaps you will recall this young lady. Ms Mahfouz was a young woman who expressed her faith by wearing her headscarf as she addressed us here, while defending the civil values on which this European Union of ours is built in a lively and passionate speech. Rarely in this

House have I seen as impressive a fighter for the cause of democracy as Ms Mahfouz. For her work, she is now threatened with imprisonment in Egypt. I believe that it is the responsibility of the European Parliament to say to the Egyptians that people like Ms Mahfouz are the future of their country, and that they should be promoting them rather than locking them up.

(Applause)

11. Documents received: see Minutes

12. Questions for oral answer and written declarations (submission): see Minutes

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

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

15. Petitions: see Minutes

16. Transfers of appropriations: see Minutes

17. Order of business: see Minutes

18. EU trade negotiations with Japan (debate)

President. – The next item is the statement from the Commission on EU trade negotiations with Japan (2012/2651(RSP)).

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, honourable Members, thank you for this opportunity to speak on our trade relations with Japan.

What I told the Council recently, and would like to reiterate here today, is that we are now confronted with a very important decision on the future of our relations with Japan: namely, whether we move towards free trade negotiations with one of our main economic partners or we freeze these relations for several years to come.

My view is that, based on the scoping exercise we have just completed, we are now in a position to move ahead with the next steps and should move to open negotiations. The ground has been fully prepared. First, we have an upfront agreement with Japan on what both sides expect from the negotiations. This scoping paper, which lays out the scope of our potential discussions, is the most ambitious that we have agreed in all of our trade negotiations. Therefore, we have the comfort that all our priorities will be addressed in future negotiations.

Second, regulatory barriers are the most important problem for European trade and investment in Japan. As a result, we have negotiated – again upfront – a dedicated package which addresses the key issues. We have already found satisfactory solutions for barriers in the car, foodstuff and pharmaceutical sectors. For a number of others, I will admit that some uncertainty remains.

Clearly, a failure by Japan to deliver on these barriers would have a very negative impact on any negotiations. Europe could not conclude an agreement if that were the case. But this political reality should be backed up with legal force and that is why the Commission's

proposal for the negotiating directives includes a provision clearly stating that if Japan has not delivered on its non-tariff road maps within a year from the start of the negotiations, the negotiations will be stopped.

This would oblige us to take stock of the situation one year from the start of the negotiations and, as mentioned, if progress were not satisfactory, we would simply call off the discussions.

I would also like to highlight another important principle that we have agreed with Japan: we have accepted that the phasing out of tariffs can only take place strictly in parallel with the elimination of regulatory barriers and according to mutually agreed timetables. That means that Europe will not commit to dismantling tariffs before Japan delivers concrete results on regulatory barriers, including those for the car sector.

Third, the thorniest issue we faced in our discussions with Japan was on public procurement in the railways sector. Here, I am pleased to say we have secured a good compromise. Japan has agreed to take effective measures in the context of the negotiations to open up its railways and urban transport market to EU suppliers.

I want to highlight, as I have done before in this House, that trade liberalisation remains the cheapest way we have to stimulate our economy. Ninety per cent of world growth will happen in the markets outside the EU in the future. Europe needs to be a big player in those markets if we are to return to prosperity. Considering its future weight in the world economy, we have a broad strategy for getting better access to Asia in particular. This agreement is a key piece in that puzzle. I would ask you to bear that in mind.

In the weeks to come, the Commission intends to submit draft negotiating directives to the Council and start discussions on the content of a mandate. So this is a moment to seize and I hope we will have your support.

President. – Before I disclose the list of speakers, I have a remarkably happy announcement to make. In the front row, directly opposite me, you can see Ms Lulling. She is standing up now. Hello, Ms Lulling! Ms Lulling is celebrating her 83rd birthday today, so happy birthday, Ms Lulling!

(Applause)

Ms Lulling, you are as fit as a 38-year-old, I have to say. You have my sincere congratulations on that. If you follow your dear president even more in future, you will be even younger!

Many happy returns!

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – *(PL)* Mr President, I would like to thank the Commissioner very much for explaining the events of the past year. We really do have a great deal to be happy about, and the Commission deserves our praise.

However, I should like to remind you that last year, our Chamber voted in favour of a resolution on trade relations with Japan. In this resolution, we voiced what was not so much opposition as a certain concern. We asked several questions to which we wanted answers. Work started on a scoping exercise back in June last year, and has continued during the year that has passed since then. The work would appear to have progressed very efficiently, and two weeks ago we received a report summarising it. Unfortunately, we have not received any answers to the questions we asked last year. The doubts we voiced in the previous resolution have not been resolved, in particular, as regards indicators for the

removal of non-tariff barriers, or the scope of public rail tenders, for example. There were a great many more questions, and I could go into much more detail on them, but that is not the point. I believe that the issues we raised back then should be raised again.

Measures with a view to launching negotiations are still ongoing; this is very positive, and I am of the opinion that our Chamber should be involved in them. The European Parliament should also help to clarify public expectations. We are therefore proposing today that Rule 90(2) of the Rules of Procedure should be applied. We would like to ask the Council to wait until the Committee on International Trade has drafted a report stating its opinion before issuing a mandate to launch negotiations. We do not wish to hold back the negotiations and we are not opposed to them. We are most definitely in favour of them. What we are opposed to, however, is the questions we asked in the previous resolution being left unanswered.

I therefore hope that we will receive more honest responses from the Commission following work in the Committee on International Trade, and I will be even happier if we can support both the Commission and the Council in these negotiations, since I believe that Japan is a good and long-term partner, and that we should support the stepping up of our relations.

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

Jörg Leichtfried (S&D), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr Wałęsa, I listened with great interest to what you had to say, and something struck me. I want to ask you about it in more detail, as we keep having a discussion about it and this point has never been conclusively cleared up. You said that the European Parliament should be involved, and take part, in the negotiations with Japan. There are two different schools of thought in this regard. The first says that we should not do so, but that we should evaluate the results at the end and provide our approval or rejection. The second school of thought is that we absolutely should get involved directly.

Do you believe that it would be better if Members of this House were directly involved in the negotiations? If not, how do you think the European Parliament should get involved?

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE), *Blue-card answer.* – (PL) Mr Leichtfried, thank you very much for your question. This would mean we can now pursue a purely academic debate. If the European Parliament is not meant to participate in these negotiations, why do our Rules of Procedure allow us to take the steps to which I referred in my speech? If we do not have the right to voice our doubts and to call on the Council to delay issuing a negotiating mandate, why are those provisions there, when they should be removed? It is my feeling that if the Rules of Procedure clearly state that we can participate in negotiations, then this is all the more reason for us to do so, for our voice to be heard, and for us to draw attention as often as possible to our right to participate. Otherwise, this debate is a purely academic one, but I think it is much more important than that.

Bernd Lange, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, and of course – at least virtually – President-in-Office of the Council, our resolution is essentially directed towards the Council, as the reality is that we believe – and this touches on Mr Leichtfried's question – that we, as Parliament, should proffer our position on the issuing of a mandate before one is issued. There is a good reason for this.

You have already addressed the resolutions that we have adopted with numerous questions. These resolutions did show quite clearly the two sides of the coin when it comes to trade relations with Japan. We support increased trade relations with Japan – that much is clear

– as the negotiations at WTO level have ground to a halt and Japan is one of our most important trading partners in the world. Over the last year, EU exports to Japan had a total value of around EUR 49 billion, while exports from Japan to the EU came in at around EUR 69 billion – in other words, we are talking about a very important part of our economic dynamics. That being the case, we need to also strengthen this so that the inter-exchange and the growth dynamic develop further. That is right and proper. On the other side of the coin, however, when it comes to market access on the Japanese side, we actually have non-tariff barriers to trade. That, after all, is why the Commission carried out this scoping exercise, and it was only recently that we obtained the results.

Once again, analysing this situation precisely is the right thing to do. No sooner do we look, for example, at the key sector that is the motor industry, than three non-tariff barriers to trade hit us right in the face. Of course there is, for one thing, an agreement at UN level about technical standards for cars, as well as for vehicle parts. Clearly, recognition of this is crucial to market access. The European Union has signed up to nearly all of these guidelines, whereas Japan has only signed up to 43. In order to also be able to supply car parts to the Japanese market with unfettered access, it is actually a basic prerequisite that Japan, too, should sign up to these UN conventions.

If I consider, now, the tax breaks enjoyed by environmentally friendly vehicles, I can see that, in Japan, these depend solely on test cycle JC08. Logic dictates, however, that this cycle is not adhered to by vehicles that we produce here, as we test according to a different cycle, the European driving cycle. It needs to be ensured that the same tax benefits for environmentally friendly vehicles – we define these as vehicles emitting below 90 grams of CO₂ per kilometre – are ensured for European vehicles in Japan, too, without jeopardising the standard by so doing.

Of course, traders must also have the opportunity to offer their cars for sale in Japan, and to have them maintained in workshops there. Current property law does not provide for that.

So, then, we need a tougher re-presentation of the scoping exercise and clear guidelines from Parliament. That is why we are calling on the Council to wait until September to issue a mandate, that is, until Parliament has drawn up clear guidelines for a mandate for trade relations with Japan.

IN THE CHAIR: GEORGIOS PAPASTAMKOS

Vice-President

Metin Kazak, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (BG) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the new French President, François Hollande, is right: the European Union needs jobs and growth. Youth unemployment is at record levels and economic growth has barely reached 1.5%. International trade is turning into a key growth factor in response to the needs of the European Union's shrinking internal market. Europe needs bigger markets where European producers can export our products. It needs cheaper products for European importers and consumers, as well as opportunities for more profitable investments to become available and be given to European companies.

This is why it is vitally important that the European Union's trade policy is targeted at those countries where European business can gain the most. The agreements with Colombia, Peru and Central America cannot revitalise the EU's stuttering economy. What the EU

really needs are free trade agreements, both with the large newly emerging economies, such as India and Brazil, and with the global economic giants like the US and Japan.

This is why I too, representing the Liberals in Parliament, support the opportunity for potentially opening the negotiations on a free trade agreement with Japan. I believe that Europe must not miss the moment to strengthen its contacts with Japan across the board, including its economic relations with the world's third largest economy.

The opportunity to overcome the biggest obstacles hampering deeper relations between the European Union and Japan relating to the removal of the non-tariff barriers in important European business sectors (and which my colleagues mentioned: car manufacturing and electronics), the reduction in tariffs and progress on public procurement will generate billions of euro in profits for European firms and will create new jobs which European citizens desperately need.

We must take this step before it is far too late, and before Japan decides that it is no longer worth waiting and heads east towards the United States and the countries of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

I obviously understand that some colleagues and Member States are distrustful of Japan, still unable to meet all the commitments it has made, which have been outlined in the scoping exercise for the negotiations. However, I firmly believe that this distrust is more the result of pessimism and conservatism. Of course we must not be naive. At the same time, however, we must not forget that initiating negotiations on a free trade agreement between the European Union and Japan does not mean, as Commissioner De Gucht also emphasised, that these negotiations need to be concluded at any price.

This is also why I think that the Commission needs to be given a mandate now to initiate negotiations on a free trade agreement, with the clear insistence, however, that, if Japan fails to meet its commitments in the car sector and, most of all, on public procurement, we will be obliged to halt these negotiations or review our position towards them continuing in the future.

However, if the European Union waited now, if it waits again and again after this, and continues waiting, I think that we will squander one of the biggest opportunities in our trade policy. This is why I am actually making an appeal to my colleagues. I do support the view that Parliament should have its say before giving a mandate, but we must not be so conservative and we need to give growth in Europe a chance.

Yannick Jadot, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I hope that someone is taking notes for the Danish Presidency. We also share the positive view on this resolution. It is extremely important for us that the Council be able to hear the voice of Parliament on the mandate. I believe that the institutional agreement framework is clear. It is not a binding opinion but, in view of both the economic and social crises, and the trade deficits that we have in Europe, it is absolutely essential to get trade agreements and the content of the negotiations right.

For that reason, should it happen, for once, that the Council listens to what Parliament has to say before establishing the negotiating mandate, I think that we could take a step forward in terms of the quality of the agreements that we can approve. I think that recent experience, including the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), shows that from a policy standpoint, it would be wise to listen to what Parliament has to say before entering into negotiations.

For the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, it is not a question of obtaining, pre-negotiation, concessions from the Japanese, as certain groups understand it. We are simply saying: let us have a transparent negotiation process that is clear, and thereby not enter into several negotiation processes at the same time. Let us have a clear mandate with which we can start negotiations.

That also raises some questions. Conducting negotiations with Japan and with the United States also raises some questions. In our Committee on International Trade, we have, on several occasions, had discussions with Pascal Lamy and today this process marks a break. Entering into negotiations with a large trade bloc such as Japan or the United States marks a break in the European position and, as such, puts to one side, or takes note of, the failed negotiations that took place in the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

We must take greater consideration of the consequences of these negotiations, in particular, when they primarily concern the regulatory system, investments, public markets, and all of the regulatory frameworks rather than tariffs. We must consider what bilateral negotiations signify as opposed to multilateral negotiations.

Then, Commissioner, you said that 90%, I believe, of the growth – this is your figure – will take place outside of Europe. I am not sure that Japan is the most dynamic area right now, but to benefit further from this international growth means being able to sell, which entails having a strategic vision of our economy and our industrial sector. Once again, I regret the fact that we have some 20 trade negotiations ongoing around the world without having an industrial policy, without knowing what we want for our economy, for example, for our automotive industry over the next 20 years.

Helmut Scholz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, it is not just the European Union that is experiencing economically difficult times. Japan, too, finds itself in a long struggle, which was made even worse by the disaster last year. The EU's trade agreement with South Korea, a direct competitor of Japan, put the government and businesses of that country under pressure, and that also affects the jobs and overall social situation in Japan. However, while many European governments are often quickly enthused by agreements with developing countries, as these are always negotiated to the advantage of European businesses and investors, the conservatives – including in this House – are currently applying the brakes to the talks with Japan. Aware of Japan's dire straits, some are even calling for the Japanese to kowtow before real negotiations can take place.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends prove themselves in times of trouble. The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) would be ill-advised – as certainly all of us in this House would be, too – to categorise Japan as a beggar now, rather than a partner. The dispute about non-tariff barriers to trade is also something that we should resolve eye-to-eye at the negotiating table. In those negotiations, our aim should not be to cut as many laws as possible that our trading partner has developed. We need to analyse the regulations in dispute based on their purpose and aim in order to achieve a result that provides the social benefit required but which, at the same time, favours the trade of products, without, for example, reducing levels of consumer protection or environmental targets.

In addition, we also take very seriously the concerns of Japanese farmers, who see their livelihoods threatened by future European agricultural exports. Similarly, there must be no agreement if the interests of the people of Europe are not safeguarded. My group will

certainly not vote in favour of any treaty in which the investment protection chapter grants companies a right of action against governments or the EU.

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

Daniel Caspary (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr Scholz, I have three questions for you.

First of all, do you agree with me that this resolution has been submitted not just by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), but jointly with nearly all the other groups?

Secondly, do I understand you correctly when you say that there actually could be circumstances under which you ultimately could vote in favour of a free trade agreement of this kind with Japan?

My third question is: do you agree with me that your group in this House has never yet voted in favour of any free trade agreement and that therefore perhaps, ultimately, the likelihood is high that, in the case of Japan, too, you will reject it and your group will actually do the exact opposite of what you promised to do, namely, to do something for the good of the people of Japan as well?

Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL), *Blue-card answer.* – (DE) Thank you, Mr Caspary. In response to your first question, I do believe it very likely that all or many of the groups jointly submitted this draft resolution. Nonetheless, the questions I asked are of pressing interest, including because they are accepted and considered not merely by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), but by all the groups. That is why I pointed out that we need to make progress here with the negotiations. In that regard, it needs to be more than just scoping. We need to go a step further and, as Mr Lange said, also incorporate this consideration when issuing the mandate.

The answers to the second and third questions I will provide to Mr Caspary in person.

Daniel Caspary (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in order to avoid any misunderstandings, I want to make clear right at the outset that good relations between the European Union and Japan are extremely important to my group and to me personally. Luckily, like the Member States of the European Union, Japan is a free democracy with human rights and a market economy. Sadly, there are all too few countries around the world where that is the case. That is why we need close contact with Japan.

It is also true, though, that we have been engaged in what is known as a high-level dialogue with Japan for years now, and it has produced no results whatsoever. Fascinatingly, the results of this were not that this high-level dialogue was to be taken to a successful conclusion, but the answer that Japan and the Commission came up with, instead, was to commence a 'scoping exercise' in respect of a free trade agreement.

A number of subjects have already been mentioned. The Commissioner, for instance, brought up the subject of the railways, which is an incredibly good example, because our market for public procurement in the railway sphere is as open as possible, and Japanese firms are able to compete. Yet we need to beg and scrape and do everything possible just to now obtain a very small degree of access to the Japanese market. This cannot be how this is supposed to work.

The same applies in the automotive sector, which Mr Lange has already addressed. Of course, the import figures into the European Union for Japanese vehicles are not much larger than our export figures into Japan. We must not, however, ignore the fact that the Japanese already have such good access to our markets in Europe that, as luck would have it, they produce 100 000 cars in Europe, while we do not produce so much as a single European car in Japan. This, too, shows that we need fair conditions before we enter into negotiations.

The next issue that is close to my heart that I want to raise is that I wish that we should not engage in never-ending negotiations. When we start negotiations, it must also be ensured that the Commission has enough resources to bring them to a prompt conclusion. We have been negotiating for years with over a dozen countries around the world on free trade agreements, but we have concluded hardly any of them. I would like to see the Commission investing sufficient personnel resources in order to achieve tangible results as regards the free trade agreement with Japan so that we do not negotiate for five or ten years only to find ourselves still without a result. I would like to see negotiations with a fixed schedule. I would like to see an agreement. I would like to see the negotiations concluded within one, two or, at the most, three years, before, unfortunately, we then in any case have to wait another year at the European end until we have the translations in place.

This, as it happens, is another subject which I would be very grateful if the Commissioner could bring up in the Commission at some point. I find it unsatisfactory for the European Union that it sometimes takes a year or more after the negotiations have been concluded before we finally have all the translations in Parliament. This is another area where the Commission needs a great deal more resources.

When it comes to the results, I would like to see negotiations commence with Japan. However, I would like us, Parliament, to first clarify what we want to say and for the Commission to then go all out to conclude such negotiations within a reasonable timeframe.

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

Yannick Jadot (Verts/ALE), *Blue-card question.* – (FR) I have a quick question for Mr Caspary: is it already the case that despite the conditions that the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) imposed with regard to concluding an agreement, it has already voted against a free trade agreement?

Now a subsidiary question: does Mr Caspary recall a single impact assessment concerning the implementation of a free trade agreement which can confirm all the benefits which were announced when the free trade agreement was negotiated, be they social or economic benefits?

Daniel Caspary (PPE), *Blue-card answer.* – (DE) Mr Jadot, it is wonderful that we were able to achieve many things through the pressure that we, as the European Parliament, can apply. Thus, for example, as Parliament, we were able to force through common elements in relation to the free trade agreement with Korea that also then made broad approval possible for us.

Secondly, there are free trade agreements which have been successful. We should all take a look at the European Union. The fact that we have managed to complete the European internal market, the fact that we now have a giant free trade agreement in place in Europe with common social and environmental standards, really does show that this very path of common agreements can improve the situation overall.

Gianluca Susta (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the prudence with which the Commission is looking at the new system of relations between the first and the fourth largest economies in the world is a comfort to us. Deep underlying reasons, based on the history of our times, push for relations between the democracies of Europe and of the Rising Sun, based on the desire for friendship, development and the opening up of new opportunities.

We cannot, however, overlook the fact that, amid all the distrust caused by long-term antagonism and by resentments that have not yet fully died down, the history of a system of relations in the name of multipolarity, overcoming the hegemony of the United States, is pushing us into new partnerships with the Far East. This has led to new forms of cooperation between China and Japan, shifting the balance that has become established since the Second World War and which must not be used against the European Union.

The new set-ups which are being introduced at global level and in the major regions of the world thus require the European Union to be an enterprising key player, both by strengthening the multilateral approach and through bilateral relationships that will help Europe strengthen its competitiveness. For these political and economic reasons, we fully support your efforts to create conditions that will improve the system of relations between ourselves and Japan.

However, we are not willing to begin negotiations unless the Council first involves Parliament in drafting the negotiating mandate. Although, formally, Parliament has the power to conclude the negotiation process by ratifying, or otherwise, any treaties that have been signed, it is equally true that parliaments throughout the world, due to their democratic legitimacy, have always been involved in drawing up the policies that underlie negotiating mandates. Europe needs to follow not only the letter but also the spirit of the treaties, so we call upon the Council, in this as in other cases, to duly take this into account.

Finally, acknowledging the words of the Commissioner, we stress that it is imperative that Japan prove it wishes to break down tariff and especially non-tariff barriers that still dominate its domestic market. It is not therefore our intention to impede negotiations, but to assume responsibility for the growing demand within European public opinion, which fears that bringing together an open internal market such as ours with the increasingly closed markets of our main competitors will, in the end, damage our competitiveness and, with it, growth and employment.

Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it would be a shame if Parliament and the Council failed to give the green light to negotiations with Japan, though this time around asking for something we have never previously asked for in similar situations.

I agree with the rapporteur Metin Kazak: if there are no negotiations, Japan will look further east – as Mr Susta said just now – to the rest of Asia and to the Pacific rather than to Europe. Such a closure would be paradoxical for us, given that it is a fully democratic country, whereas we have ongoing negotiations with other countries that are dictatorships in one way or another, such as Vietnam or Singapore.

Moreover, let there be no talk about the European crisis as a reason for holding back such negotiations. The crisis will not be defeated by clamping shut like a clam, through protectionism. The crisis will be defeated by open, intelligent trade, by a wisdom that we have perhaps not always had, and by basing our stance on reciprocity, as I – together with

Mr Daul, Mr Guerrero Salom, Mr Susta and Ms Muscardini – called for in written statement No 0016/2012 on fair trade, which I invite you all to sign.

In this case, it means not closing the door on Japan, but negotiating measures to ensure the removal of non-tariff barriers, bilateral safeguards for sensitive sectors – and we can strengthen such safeguards – the protection of geographical indications for our products, the removal of barriers that hamper trade today, especially for our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which could otherwise find a further outlet in Japan, the opening up of Japanese public procurement to our companies, including SMEs, a mechanism for judging business disputes which today we are finding hard to put in place, as well as cooperation on post-Fukushima energy, based on sustainable development. These and other things we can ask for and obtain from Japan. We cannot agree with simply giving up from the start.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, the European Union and Japan enjoy good bilateral relations. An important part of these relations is the existing strong trading links between the two parties. I absolutely believe that these also need to continue to be expanded and deepened. Against the backdrop of global stagnation, trade can play a very important role here in helping countries and regions to achieve increased economic growth and thus, increased prosperity for the citizens on both sides.

However, stronger trade relations cannot be obtained at any price. Entering into trade agreements also means accepting responsibility – vis-à-vis European citizens, vis-à-vis small and medium-sized enterprises, but, above all, also vis-à-vis the environment. A precise weighing up of the advantages and disadvantages but, in particular, respectful gestures on an equal footing, must be the fundamental prerequisite for the commencement of trade negotiations. Commitments, Commissioner, must also be lived up to.

For me, the area of agriculture is of rather particular importance. I would like to ask a couple of questions relating to food safety, the designation of geographical origin and organic products. In relation to the Commission's most recent talks with the Japanese delegation, I would like to hear from the Commissioner whether, during these talks, he was able to bring up barriers to trade in the sphere of food safety, specifically not only in relation to the Fukushima disaster, but in general? I would also be interested to hear the latest state of affairs when it comes to the designation of geographical origin for foodstuffs. How did the initial talks in this area go and what assessments would you make in this connection?

My third question relates to the area of organically produced agricultural products. What form can you envisage for a potential mutual recognition of organic products in this field? What specific efforts is the Commission making in this field?

A number of my fellow Members have already pointed out today what an important partner Japan is for the future of European trade policy. Commissioner, please ensure we have fair conditions, and please ensure we have a reasonable timeframe!

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, Japan is the European Union's sixth largest trading partner, while the EU is Japan's third largest trading partner. A free trade agreement between Japan and the European Union would entail substantial benefits for both sides. A large proportion of the benefits deriving from such an agreement will be gained by Japan lifting the barriers, especially non-tariff ones, which it currently imposes on the European Union. A second thorny issue is Japan's public procurement market, to which European companies are still failing to gain sufficient access.

Before initiating the negotiations aimed at achieving a free trade agreement, Japan must demonstrate its willingness to make the necessary concessions in these two areas. Given that the discussions on these subjects have not made sufficient progress so far, it is not appropriate to embark hastily on the negotiations. Before authorising the go-ahead with these, the Council must respect Parliament's opinion on the proposed negotiating mandate.

Christofer Fjellner (PPE). – (SV) Mr President, Japan is the world's third largest economy and an extremely important trading partner for us here in Europe. Trade between us is not without its complications, however. Having met with many European and Japanese companies, I think that the picture is pretty clear. The huge challenges faced by European companies in Japan consist of discriminatory bureaucracy and complicated procedures as well as a huge number of protectionist rules. Japanese companies, for their part, complain all the more about European duties.

I am therefore pleased that we are now, slowly but surely, getting close to initiating free trade negotiations, because this is precisely the tool to deal with both of these problems. Now that we have finished discussing the scope, we can also clearly see the benefits that we can expect from a free trade agreement. It is therefore important for us now to take the next step, for the Council to set a clear mandate for negotiations and for the Commission to initiate those negotiations.

As we have heard to a certain extent here in plenary today, however, there is opposition to these negotiations, but I think that it is rather interesting, because this opposition is somewhat different to the kind we usually see when we discuss free trade negotiations. It is not the usual kind of opposition relating to agricultural protectionism or talk of social or environmental dumping, and it is not north against south. Instead, it seems to be more difficult in this case as it is often economies that are similar to each other that need to come together.

It is a question of rules that have to be equal, and I do not believe that these negotiations will be easy. A number of us visited Japan to discuss the preconditions for a free trade agreement with Japanese representatives, and I must admit that I was not entirely convinced of their resolve and willingness to get to grips with the difficult decisions that need to be made precisely with regard to amending these discriminatory rules. This does not mean that we should not initiate negotiations, however. On the contrary, I believe that it is within the context of negotiations that we can exert the pressure that we need to exert in order to open up the Japanese market for European companies.

We need a free trade agreement. At the present time, when it is more popular than ever to talk about us needing reforms for growth, there is no other growth reform that could be as good and as effective as a free trade agreement. This is a reform that will not cost any money, but, unfortunately, there seem to be a lot of European leaders and representatives who do not recognise such a reform, despite the fact that it is staring them in the face. I therefore suggest that, as soon as possible, we propose that we enter into full negotiations with Japan concerning a free trade agreement.

Christel Schaldemose (S&D). – (DA) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we need more growth, and we need more production in order to create more jobs for the citizens of Europe. I believe that more trade between Europe and elsewhere can help create these jobs. Japan is the third largest economy in the world. I know from my own country, Denmark, that we have very good experiences of trading with Japan. We have a surplus in that trade. I believe that the potential is huge for the whole EU, and I therefore support the

Commission and the Council. Let us get the negotiations under way now. There are barriers, it is true, but I believe that the best solutions to those barriers are to be found at the negotiating table. It is also true that there are still questions that remain unanswered, but I believe that there is still time to get them answered. It seems to me that, for the citizens' sake, we need to get negotiations on increased trade under way. That is something that we need, both in Europe and in Japan.

Ivo Belet (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, a free trade agreement – we all agree – can be a boon for the economy and also for the prosperity of the population of both parties to the agreement. However, there can also be serious drawbacks, and there may be sectors – including in Europe, Commissioner – that suffer heavily under agreements of this kind.

That was, and is also, the case today in the free trade agreement that we have concluded with South Korea. This agreement has a pernicious influence on the European automotive industry. The fact that European car makers are inadequately able to sell their vehicles in South Korea has nothing to do with a lack of innovation or a lack of competitiveness. On the contrary, it has everything to do with the doggedly persisting non-tariff barriers to trade in South Korea and the blatant lack of a level playing field. The deterrent in the form of what are known as the safeguard clauses seems clearly not to work in this case, either.

The truth is, Commissioner, that we cannot afford a repeat of a scenario like this when it comes to Japan. Mr Lange pointed out very clearly – and I agree with him 100% – that the Japanese, just like the South Koreans, are extremely proficient in the art of establishing, maintaining and continuing regulations producing non-tariff barriers to trade of this kind. Technical standardisation, in particular, where they are on a completely different wavelength to us and take a much less voluntary approach than we do here in the EU, is of crucial importance in this regard. There are also other non-tariff barriers to trade, such as those of a fiscal nature, a technical environmental nature, and so on.

We do need to make that absolutely crystal clear as part of the scoping exercise before we begin negotiations. I hope you are prepared to promise that. I think we can say that the European automotive industry cannot be the victim of a global deal again – in this case with Tokyo – a deal where there will, of course, be give and take. In the European automotive industry today, we are faced with an actual overcapacity, with potential further restructuring measures and further problems that would arise as a result of this uneven deal with Japan and which we, of course, could overlook today.

In summary, Commissioner, we can only have a future free trade agreement with Japan on condition that we have cast-iron guarantees, cast-iron safeguard clauses, and that there will be a level playing field in the industrial sectors, specifically in respect of the automotive sector. This idea is also set out in the CARS 21 report that the Commission very recently agreed – last week – with the car manufacturers. I propose that we meticulously implement that agreement in this field.

Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D). – (PL) Mr President, I believe that it is a good idea for us to discuss issues relating to economic cooperation with Japan, since our economies are, to a large extent, complementary. At the same time, both Japan and the European Union have reached a relatively high level of development at home and should work together to find ways of opening up new opportunities for the future.

I think that we can identify three key points in what Commissioner De Gucht has said. Firstly, that we need balanced conditions for both sides, which relate to both restrictive duties and limited access to internal markets. Secondly, the Commissioner discussed certain priorities, such as the foodstuff, car and industrial goods markets. Nevertheless, given the experience we have gained in various fields, we need more time before finally issuing a mandate, and I think that Mr Lange is right when he proposes that we should return to this matter in September.

Sandra Kalniete (PPE). – (LV) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the world expects from the European Union the ability to take decisive action, create new jobs and give a strong impetus to growth. Very unfortunate as it is, however, the news reaching the world about Europe is not positive; it is mostly negative. We all realise that this free trade agreement would give us better access, better access for Europe to the Asian markets. Each of us today also realises that the negotiations will not be easy. However, only by starting negotiations shall we be able to solve anything. The Latvian people have a saying that water does not run under a standing stone. So, then, if we do not start negotiations, that will be the standing stone in the way of trade and intensification of our economic relations.

Of course, we have unfinished and unclear issues related to non-tariff barriers in the automotive sector, the pharmaceutical sector, in public procurement, and also with regard to agricultural products. However, the European Commission has stated very clearly that it is ready to suspend the negotiations if Japan does not fulfil the commitments undertaken in the pre-negotiation stage. I wish to again underline the fact that the faster we begin the negotiations, the stronger our signal to the world that Europe is active and able to take action.

Let us not forget that Japan has supported us with contributions to the Stabilisation Fund, and that Japan shares our values. Our potential today has not been realised. If it is so hard for us to begin negotiations with Japan on a free trade agreement, how shall we ever get to negotiate with the United States of America on a free trade agreement, which is currently being discussed in political science circles as one of the ways of strengthening the unity of the democratic states?

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (S&D). – Mr President, the EU and Japan are natural partners. Many of the problems confronting both are similar – ageing populations, a social system based on budgetary deficits, concern for the environment, etc. There are 3 300 Japanese enterprises operating in Europe, employing 400 000 people; 65 models of Japanese car are produced in Europe, providing 74 000 jobs, while the EU's total investment in Japan has reached JYP 15 trillion. Therefore, Parliament, especially through the Parliamentary Delegation for relations with Japan, is committed to further development of the EU's relations with Japan.

The positive conclusion of the scoping exercise is to be saluted, but the mandate to the Commission for those negotiations has to be approved by Parliament too, not just by the Council. I only hope that our Japanese friends understand correctly the nature of our request, which is not directed against their country, but is rather simply aimed at compliance with the EU Treaties.

Malcolm Harbour (ECR). – Mr President, I have listened with great interest to the debate and I am pleased that a number of my colleagues from the Delegation for relations with Japan have been speaking in favour of the Commission stance.

But I have a deeper relationship with Japan and with the motor industry because I have had the experience – which I do not think anyone else here can claim – of having run a company importing cars into Japan, which was very successful.

We have heard a lot about cars already, and I just want to make this broader point. This is a package that by any analysis – and we have had a comprehensive analysis now on the table for two years – will generate very large benefits for the European economy, across all sectors.

But the key difference between Japan and Korea is that the Japanese market is already open to many European companies in whole areas of branded goods and, by the way, that includes automotive goods.

What we are dealing with here is a complex set of non-tariff barriers. The scoping study was a response to that and we have moved forward on it.

But I want to say, and particularly to colleagues in the PPE Group whom I am disturbed to see are speaking in such protectionist terms, that dealing with non-tariff barriers is a far more complex and difficult and deep-seated issue than dealing with tariffs.

As chairman of the Committee on the Internal Market, I deal with non-tariff barriers every day of the week. We have more experience in dealing with this than any other grouping in this House. We will not make any substantial progress in the real detail of non-tariff barriers – and I would like to say to Mr Belet, by the way, that we know what they are with regard to cars; I can tell you what they are, off by heart. It is a question of getting the administrative capability in Japan to sort this out and to respond to political leadership.

Frankly, we will not move forward unless we follow the Commission's line: we actually start those negotiations and we will move forward, but, as he says, we will not conclude the agreements until we have got the deal on the table.

Now, I would say to my colleagues in the PPE Group, what on earth is wrong with that and why are you going back on your stance on supporting free trade agreements? I am very pleased that we have had support on the other side of the House and I really hope that you will agree with me that this is the right way forward and we have those safeguards in place.

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

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – (PL) Mr Harbour, I have one question which is essentially the same as one put to me. Do you believe, Mr Harbour, that our Chamber should be entirely excluded from these negotiations and from such important discussions? Should we not be able to have our say on this matter? If you believe that we should be excluded, then we have nothing further to discuss.

Malcolm Harbour (ECR), *Blue-card answer.* – Mr President, we will clearly have a say – if that question was directed at me – because it will come back to us for agreement. That is what the Commissioner has said.

My point is that this is a really detailed-level set of negotiations. Do you want to sit down here as a Parliament and decide some of the details on whether we get support for UNECE legislation on emissions, on how Japan deals with particular variants of new models coming from Europe, on whether we have common test standards on cars, and on whether we have a particular category of small vehicles that excludes Europeans?

These are detailed matters which we need to leave the Commission and experts to get on with, but we will have a say when it comes back to us. If colleagues in the Committee on International Trade work with us and the Japanese delegation, we will be involved in this as well.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, the future reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers between two countries, or between one country and a trading bloc, sounds very even-handed and fair, but it is based on the assumption of the existence of comparable markets in each of the two countries or trading blocs. Indeed, it is based on an assumption of utility-maximising consumers in each; consumers in each buying goods on the sole criteria of price and quality. However, Japanese consumers are as different from Western consumers as they are admirable. They do not buy on these criteria alone. They are predisposed to buying Japanese goods because they *are* Japanese goods. All of this means that the removal of EU tariffs on Japanese goods will be as efficacious as the removal of Japanese tariffs on European goods will be irrelevant.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, first of all, an answer to some technical questions which have been asked. There was a question on whether food security NGIs were included in the scoping. The answer is yes, food security is covered by the EU rules on sanitary and phytosanitary issues which themselves are part of all EU free trade negotiations. The same applies to geographical indications; specifics, of course, will be addressed during the negotiations. There was also a question on mutual recognition of organic produce. Recognition of EU organic foods in Japan is one of the early deliveries on our NTB list so this problem is being rectified and will be solved in practice before any negotiations start.

The second set of questions are about the role of INTA in these negotiations. I believe that in the case of Japan, the European Parliament has been duly informed that we were about to propose that the Council authorise negotiations, first orally by myself and Director-General Demarty in the INTA meetings of April and May respectively, and secondly in writing by Jean-Luc Demarty through an e-mail to INTA Chair Moreira on 17 April. Also, Director Mauro Petriccione debriefed the Japan monitoring group of INTA in May on the state of play of the scoping exercise and the European Parliament now has an opportunity to give its views on this resolution. The Commission has fully lived up to the commitments under the framework agreements. By the way, the INTA members have received the result of the scoping exercise but it is a restricted document which cannot be sent to all Members of Parliament.

There were also a number of questions requesting that the Commission should wait to start the negotiations until the European Parliament has formally taken a decision. The procedure is that we have to propose negotiating directives to the Council. The Council has to decide upon those negotiating directives. It is up to the Council to decide when they give such a mandate to the Commission.

I hope that you are able to come forward with a detailed resolution before the Council takes its decision. Of course the agenda is within your hands, within the hands of INTA and the plenary, but I would suggest that if you could come up with a resolution by September, then probably you would be in time to influence the debate in the Council.

Questions were also asked on whether Parliament should not be part of the negotiating delegation. I am against that: Parliament is not made to negotiate; Parliament is made to debate, to come forward with resolutions, to make proposals and ultimately to vote on the ratification of the free trade agreement that will possibly be concluded with Japan. That is what is in the Treaty and I think it is very important for all institutions that we keep to that Treaty.

Nowhere, by the way, does a parliament negotiate free trade agreements. You will, of course, make reference to the United States, where the government can only go forward when there is a fast track, but when you look at the practice, you will see that, unless there is a fast track, the American Congress does not conclude the agreements. The whole idea that you have an agreement and then start introducing amendments can never work; it simply does not work, it has never done so in the past and will not do so in the future either.

Now, on the whole topic of the scoping and how we go forward, I believe there are two very important points. In the scoping, I think we have covered all items which you would normally cover in a broad free trade agreement. On top of that, we have asked the Japanese to give a solution on a number of non-tariff barriers. Recently, they have come forward with a proposal on those non-tariff barriers and we have observed that this is a satisfactory answer – provided, of course, that it is honoured in practice. That is why I have also told the Foreign Affairs Council on trade that our idea is to come forward with negotiating directives whereby we give the Japanese a year to deliver on these promises. They cannot deliver immediately because legislative and administrative instructions have to be changed. On the other hand, it does not make sense to negotiate if they do not deliver.

Japan being a friendly country – a democracy by the way, one of the biggest in the world – I think you realise that politically, it does not make sense to tell them: look, now deliver on all of these non-tariff barriers and then within a year we will see whether or not we will start negotiations. You do not do that. The only right political approach is to say OK, we have started negotiations, those are the promises which you have been making, we are going to check this within a year and then we will make our decision on whether or not we continue with the negotiations.

A second and very important element which we have very clearly stated is that whenever we do something about tariffs, they should do something about the NTBs so that there should be a parallel in the approach of dismantling trade impediments: on the one hand, tariffs, and, on the other hand, the non-tariff barriers. We will keep to that very strict parallelism also in negotiations.

My last remark, Mr President: we are now discussing whether or not we should start the negotiations with Japan; we are not discussing whether or not we agree with the result of a negotiation because there is not a negotiation yet. It is very extraordinary to ask a country you want to negotiate with, and that wants to negotiate with us, to deliver on a certain number of topics before you even start negotiations. Normally, you do not do that; it is quite extraordinary. What you cannot ask the Commission is to say look, now first deliver; take another year and then we will see whether or not we agree to even speak to you. That you cannot do; that we will not do, so we are going to go forward with our proposals to the Council and then, of course, it is up to the Council to decide on the negotiating mandate.

President. – I have received one motion for a resolution ⁽¹⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday, 13 June 2012, at 11.30.

19. Scheme of generalised tariff preferences (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Christofer Fjellner, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences (COM(2011)0241 – C7-0116/2011 – 2011/0117(COD)) (A7-0054/2012).

Christofer Fjellner, rapporteur. – (SV) Mr President, on Wednesday, we are to vote on the scheme of generalised tariff preferences, or the ‘GSP’ for short. As rapporteur, I would like to start by taking the opportunity to thank the Commission, the Danish Presidency and, in particular, all the shadow rapporteurs I have had the privilege of working with on this matter. We worked extremely well together, and I believe this is also evident when we look at the results.

The scheme of generalised tariff preferences is the EU’s most important trade policy instrument, in particular, when it comes to trade with developing countries. No other instrument encompasses so many countries. By using this scheme of generalised tariff preferences, we can help developing countries in their efforts to acquire basic human rights, to reduce poverty and to achieve sustainable development in general. We do this by reducing or completely abolishing duties on their goods.

This is the first time that the European Parliament has been involved in legislating on the scheme of generalised tariff preferences, despite the fact that it has been in existence for more than 40 years, and I would like to start by saying that I think the fact that we can stand here in plenary today and discuss a proposal that already comes with an agreement one year after the proposal was presented is an achievement in itself.

Early on in this work, I met many people who thought that things would be more complicated and difficult now that Parliament was involved in the decision-making process, and it has perhaps been a little bit more complicated, but no one can say that we are not working in a determined and efficient way. We put pressure on the Council to reach a decision, and instead of us following their lead, they have been forced to adopt a position on the basis of our positions.

The new proposal and what we have now negotiated with the Danish Presidency means that those countries which have succeeded in making economic progress, or which have other, more favourable agreements with the EU, are no longer included in the scheme of generalised tariff preferences and may no longer make use of this particular scheme. I have to be honest and say that, when I started work on this matter and saw some of the countries that were considered to be developing countries, I personally found it difficult to understand how some of the Gulf States, for example, could be viewed as developing countries.

It is also very clear to us, however, that we should safeguard and retain that part of the scheme of generalised tariff preferences that ensures that the poorest countries in the world

(1) See Minutes

do not need to pay duties to Europe on any products other than weapons. This is probably the particular part of the EU's trade policy of which I think we have most reason to be proud.

Our work in the European Parliament has sought to make the scheme of generalised tariff preferences transparent, predictable and more generous to those who remain in the scheme. The most important debate and the most difficult discussion we had was, I believe, that relating to the selection criteria. We knew that we needed stable and internationally recognised criteria that were also able to stand up to the scrutiny of the World Trade Organisation, and therefore we concluded that the Commission's original proposal of USD 4 000 was probably the most reasonable one. We have made some adjustments with regard to the transitional period, however.

In order to make the scheme more generous to those who remain in it, we have also included more products that may be of significance for poor countries and will increase their opportunity to trade their way to prosperity. We have also tightened up the requirements for joining the EU's flagship arrangement for human rights, GSP+, while, at the same time, making membership of the scheme more attractive.

I would just like to mention GSP+, as it is the EU's system for providing additional trade preferences in exchange for countries undertaking and committing themselves to comply with the 27 different conventions on human rights and sustainable development.

I would like to finish by thanking those of you who were involved in this work and to say that it will now be many years – another 10 years – before we need to discuss this matter again. I hope that, in 10 years' time, even fewer countries will be included in the scheme of generalised tariff preferences – partly because many will have concluded more favourable agreements with the EU, but, above all, because we will have fewer poor developing countries as a consequence of the trade to promote development that we are concerned with here.

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first of all, I would like to thank Mr Fjellner for his report and for all the work he has put into it. As he just said, we will only have to discuss this again in 10 years, and by then Mr Fjellner's hair will either have started to disappear or will be getting grey.

Just over a year ago, the Commission adopted a proposal to reform the EU Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). Few trade files under this mandate have been subject to more intense scrutiny, and I congratulate the rapporteur, the Committee on International Trade (INTA), and the Danish and Polish Presidencies, for bringing us to where we are today. I am happy to see that the compromise reached between INTA and the Council Presidency endorses the core areas of the Commission proposal.

This is not a coincidence. Our internal discussions in the Commission were as complex as yours, and our proposal was the result of very careful reflection and a detailed impact assessment. The outcome was a balanced proposal which tackles head-on the true problems we face in the GSP. It is balanced because it focuses preferences on those who need them the most while, at the same time, expanding opportunities for countries which embrace core international values or values in human rights, labour rights and the environment.

The Commission proposal confronts head-on the real issues behind GSP. The first one is that the poorest developing countries will never grow sufficiently if we do not give them the space they need to export. This space is currently taken up by countries which are

economically much more advanced and no longer need our unilateral preferences. We must focus preferences on the countries most in need.

Secondly, if we are serious about supporting sustainable development, we have to expand opportunities for those countries which are ready and willing to implement core international conventions. Thirdly, without sufficient predictability, EU importers will never make best use of the GSP and the GSP will never fulfil its potential in terms of exports and growth for the countries most in need.

The Commission proposal squares the circle by providing answers to these three challenges, while safeguarding the legitimate interests of EU industry and respecting WTO rules. While I would have preferred to do without some aspects of the compromise reached between INTA and the Council Presidency, I can and will support it because it strikes a realistic balance between the very many different views in this particularly complex dossier, and one that ultimately well reflects the policy priorities the Commission agreed on in the first place.

I therefore count on your help to support a compromise that is as realistic as it is politically important – a compromise whereby the EU will help those who need it most and those who embrace international values while respecting the interests of our industry and international law.

Michèle Striffler, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is a strategic instrument of EU development policy, particularly in terms of reducing poverty and ensuring human rights and good governance. The new legislative proposal aims to target the preferential agreement on imports for the developing countries who need it most, in other words, lower-middle income and very low income countries.

That is why, even though this report is a very good compromise, I feel rather unsatisfied because I believe that making GDP per inhabitant the sole condition for gaining access to the GSP will penalise, or at least could penalise, some small countries faced with high poverty levels – I am thinking, in particular, of Latin American countries or African countries such as Gabon, for example. For the Committee on Development, it is not sufficient for eligibility to the GSP system to depend on this sole criterion. That is why we proposed adding the human development index. I genuinely regret that this proposal has not been taken up by the Committee on International Trade (INTA).

Furthermore, good governance and, in particular, fair and transparent fiscal administration, good practices against tax evasion, as well as the fight against illicit capital flight, should also constitute new eligibility criteria for GSP+.

Daniel Caspary, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, I would like to offer my sincere congratulations to the rapporteur, Mr Fjellner. He has managed, on the basis of an already sound Commission proposal, to work out a good compromise position with the aid of a number of other Members of this House. What is the major change? The major change is that, in future, the generalised system of preferences (GSP) will be much more targeted than at present. At the moment, there are 176 developing countries that benefit from this preferential market access, whereas in future, it will be around 80. In other words, we are to be more targeted. We will be excluding countries that have slowly worked their way up to a higher income. At the same time, we are managing to grant the larger and more targeted advantages to those who urgently need them. Our objective must be to use

the preference system to pull as many countries out of poverty as possible over the next few years.

I will turn now to what I think is a good idea, which may work. I believe it is a good idea that we are providing at least 10 years of planning certainty for the countries taking part and for businesses, as only in 10 years' time is this new instrument to be subject to revision. That is a clear improvement on the situation in the past, when people never knew whether some element of the system would be changed in the near future, whether production could be relocated to a developing country, or whether there was a need to factor in the potential loss of one advantage or another again in the near future. Indeed, we have even improved the conditions for GSP+, in that, while we expect more, we are also ready to grant more advantages in return. In so doing, we are making GSP+ considerably more interesting, meaning that we are providing more incentives for our standards – which is to say, the things that we believe to be right – to be met in these countries. On the other side of the coin, we are also prepared to provide advantages in return. I would love to see as many countries as possible around the world able to apply these GSP+ criteria over the next few years.

As a final point, I would like to point out that we have changed nothing for the world's poorest. In other words, for the world's poorest countries, the rule remains: everything but arms. They can export everything but arms into the countries of the European Union. I would like to see many more of the world's poorest countries taking advantage of these opportunities. I call on European industry, I call on investors, to please take advantage of this opportunity. The 'everything but arms' rule, too, will be stable over the next few years. Invest, at long last, in these countries and create growth, jobs and thus better living conditions for the people in the world's poorest countries, too. I therefore very much welcome the compromise reached. I am extremely grateful to all those involved for the quick compromise and I am grateful, above all, for the fact that, through the rapid deliberation and the speedy finding of a compromise, including between the European institutions, we now have planning certainty for all and thus development opportunities also for the poorest of the poor.

Bernd Lange, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, would like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Fjellner, and also the shadow rapporteur, Mr Martin, and the other shadow rapporteurs. They really have succeeded in negotiating a good compromise. I also call for us to pass this compromise with the largest possible majority, as there has been real success here in granting these unilateral advantages in a more targeted way.

The EU's trade policy, after all, is oft-criticised. In this area, however, it is clear that we are granting unilateral advantages to the poorest and next-to-poorest countries in the world, so that they can bolster their development on the back of these advantages. We will now be making this more targeted, and that is exactly the right approach to take. With the GSP+ countries, we are inviting them – on the basis of common values in relation to human rights and sustainability – to intensify trade relations with us still further. This also helps to strengthen sustainable development on the global level. Here too, then, what we have is a reasonable approach.

We have also ensured, however, that there are not sudden distortions in our industrial relations. In that connection, we have incorporated appropriate safety nets in those areas in which there is a competitive environment for our industrial products, so that we can

very confidently say that we are granting unilateral advantages without jeopardising any jobs within the European Union.

For those countries that will be leaving the GSP scheme, it goes without saying that the door is not closed. We invite all of them to conclude intensive trade relations with us – be it via bilateral trade negotiations, through the WTO, or through economic partnership agreements (EPAs) – with the aim of bringing about sustainable development.

Niccolò Rinaldi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats fully supports the new generalised scheme of tariff preferences (GSP), which rationalises the mechanism and makes it more consistent with its constituent objectives of support for countries in the developing world. Congratulations to the rapporteur, Christofer Fjellner, who managed to strike a balance between the various options.

There are now two commitments to undertake immediately. We need to coordinate the application of GSP with that of bilateral free trade agreements, first and foremost, so as not to alter the preferential nature of GSP for developing countries, which could even find themselves penalised by less favourable access conditions than those granted to the beneficiaries of bilateral agreements.

Even more important is the monitoring of its entry into force, especially of effective compliance with international conventions on human rights, trade union rights, environmental protection and the rule of law. In this area, we have important news: the burden of proof is reversed, meaning it will be up to countries that are potentially non-compliant with these conventions to demonstrate that they are using the criteria of good governance and respect for human rights, by virtue of which they may enjoy this generalised system of preferences.

The fact that information on this matter may come not only from the international organisations themselves, promoters of these conventions, but also from Parliament, the Council and especially from civil society, transforms this scheme into a much more participatory and democratic one. There are no less than 27 conventions to observe, including the United Nations one on climate change. This part of the scheme, without which this good work would, for the most part, be in vain, now needs to be fully implemented.

Franziska Keller, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the reform of the generalised system of preferences (GSP) was very much necessary. It is a positive that there are now longer durations, and more certainties for exporters.

The criteria are too imprecise, however, as the Committee on Development has already said. Unfortunately, the Commission is only interested in World Bank categorisation. In that connection, Parliament has been very critical in the past, and on repeated occasions, of the use of gross domestic product as the sole criterion. The definition of upper-middle income countries can apply to countries with a per capita GDP of USD 4 000, but also to those where it is up to USD 12 000. That is thus an enormous – and far too large – range, and it in no way does justice to the realities on the ground. We certainly do not object to countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait being removed. The reform to that end was good therefore. These countries, however, are high-income countries. Russia and China, on the other hand, are upper-middle income countries, but we certainly need not be concerned by their removal from the scheme either.

Yet this category also includes much poorer countries, such as Namibia and Ecuador. Until now, the Commission had at least also applied the criterion of vulnerability, which covers countries that export little, or only a very small range of goods. That meant that it was possible to at least avoid the situation where countries that are dependent on fewer products and are thus very vulnerable are categorised too high.

Why, then, has the Commission removed this criterion? It will mean the removal from the scheme of countries such as the Dominican Republic, Fiji, Gabon and Botswana, even though their economies fit the criterion of vulnerability. Why did the Commission not retain the old criteria, which were, in any case, already inadequate? It raises the suspicion that the Commission wants to force poorer countries into free trade agreements that are unfavourable to them. The preference system, however, is an instrument to promote development and cannot be replaced by pure trade instruments, in which the path of a country or a region to development no longer plays any role. Fortunately, my fellow Members will still have the chance in plenary to vote in favour of our amendment, which incorporates vulnerability as a criterion.

The new arrangements will also mean, however, that trade regions will be dismembered. Neighbouring countries in customs unions will soon have to follow different rules when exporting to the EU. This absolutely does not reflect our objective of promoting regional integration. Instead of individual countries, the Commission should be giving greater consideration to development regions. Here, too, we in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance have tabled an amendment, which I hope will meet with a great deal of support. It is also problematic for countries that one day were still benefiting from the GSP only to then find themselves outside the programme the next day. There need to be transitional periods, and we can see from our own Member States that just a few months are not enough for economic development.

Ultimately, we MEPs have to consider, for all legislative proposals, whether we focus just on speed and want to work with wonky compromises, or whether we would not rather involve the entire plenary. For me, the entire House is important for legislation, and for democracy, rather than time and speed. In fact, it takes time to enact democracy and to pass laws properly.

Robert Sturdy, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, congratulations to Mr Fjellner who has done an outstanding job.

For once in my life, I am going to actually congratulate the Commission and the Council because it was one of the few dialogues that I have been on – and I have been in this Parliament a long time – where we have actually been able to work as a unit on what I consider to be an excellent proposal.

We in the ECR Group thoroughly recommend and welcome the deal. We hope that the new regime will not only provide stability and predictability, but will also lead to the promotion of trade focused on development. The Asian lesson shows that trade is key to development, and we must do all we can to assist countries to trade their way out of poverty.

However, we as a group are a little bit disappointed that the terms of the deal were not more generous from the EU side. We cannot, on the one hand, say that we want to do all we can to help developing countries, only to back down when we think it seems to hit our bottom line. One of the ladies who have just spoken mentioned those countries which are

moving out of GSP, and I believe there should be some sort of assistance or transitional period to help them move on.

The other thing that I am always concerned about is that, whenever we discuss trade negotiations within the European Union and redo trade agreements, we tend to become rather protectionist. I know that Christofer and I believe that protectionism is not only not good for those countries but also destroys us if we are not careful. Therefore, it is good to have the proposals that are there.

Daniel mentioned EBA (Everything But Arms). We have a saying in certain areas of trade policy that it is not just EBA, it is EBA and sugar, but this is a classic example of how, sometimes, we get tied up in protecting our own systems, and that I would not like to see. However, I think it is a win-win situation. It has been an excellent negotiation and I hope the Commission will pass my thanks on to Peter Thomsen who was one of the negotiators present.

John Stuart Agnew, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – Mr President, you will be pleased to know that I will probably not speak for two minutes, so you will save some time for a change.

The EU GSP+ scheme allows preferential access to third countries but, in order to qualify for this, a country must sign and ratify 27 international treaties, some of which have far-reaching domestic consequences and some of which do not even have an exit clause. This could be described as colonialism by another name. Perversely, many EU states themselves have not even signed the treaties or agreements that they are insisting these lesser developed countries must sign.

The agreements have been attacked as being illegal under both UN and WTO law. Furthermore, some countries are so fed up with EU meddling that they are increasingly looking to autocratic China as a preferred trading partner instead. Because China does not make these political or legal demands on other trading partners, it is likely to pick this trade up for itself. I am worried about this, I am worried about the upcoming Mercosur Agreement, and I do wish the EU would stop meddling.

Helmut Scholz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, with this compromise, the Commission and the rapporteur, Mr Fjellner, are asking for Parliament's consent for a reform that would abolish the European Union's trade preferences for a number of poor countries. This fact is concealing itself behind the debate about the criteria into which we have already entered, including today. A completely arbitrary limit value has been set on per capita average income, which just happens to exceed USD 4 000 per annum. However, this value tells us nothing about the real distribution of income in many countries. In particular, the inconsistency of development processes in each country is not covered.

Do you recall the Treaty of Lisbon? The elimination of poverty is a coherent goal of the foreign policy of the European Union. Your reform will destroy hundreds of thousands of jobs in countries like Ecuador, thus tipping women, predominantly, back into poverty. I believe that the motivation is clear, and it has even been publicly acknowledged by the rapporteur. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr Fjellner for his openness and the mutual respect shown during the debate on this.

Countries such as Ecuador are to be forced to conclude a direct free trade agreement with the European Union. We have seen the simple peddling of the argument that the reform

aims to help the least developed countries. You are aware of that yourself, as trade potentials will not shift to the weak, but to the strong. Mr Lange, every major development organisation, this House's Committee on Development, as well as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and numerous national trade unions have leant their support to the amendments and the trend through which we are seeking to revise this regulation. We will bring these amendments up again with Members in plenary, and I strongly urge you to support these amendments and thus help ensure that the European Union does not withdraw from the global fight against poverty.

David Martin (S&D). – Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Christofer Fjellner, for his hard work and good cooperation.

I quite often agree with Mr Scholz on trade policy, but I fundamentally disagree with him on this matter. We are right to try and focus on the poorest countries in the world.

My group did try to include a vulnerability criteria so that some of the vulnerable upper-middle income countries could have been included in this scheme, but that was not carried, and we as a group will support the compromise agreed in the trialogue.

It is worth recalling, when we talk about GSP reform, that we still have the most generous scheme in the world for the poorest countries in the world. The Everything But Arms initiative is unparalleled, and we should be proud of that and proud that it has not been touched in this scheme.

I agree with Mr Rinaldi about the GSP+. He is right to point to the shift in the burden of proof. The weakness in GSP+ up until now has not been the criteria we have set. We have been right to insist on strong human rights and environmental and labour standards, but we have been unable to enforce these so far. This reversal in the burden of proof will make a significant difference, and I welcome it.

In terms of where we go from here, I think it is right that the scheme lasts for ten years. I know the Commission would have liked an open-ended agreement, but I thought that was too long, and ten years is a reasonable period.

What we have made clear in the trialogue is that it is not ten years from now – not ten years from the date of the agreement – but ten years from the date of implementation of the agreement, so this gives importers inside the European Union a period of stability and it gives our exporting partners ten years in which to take advantage of the situation. Built into this scheme as well, there is the flexibility for countries to join if they become poorer countries, and to enter into the scheme at a later stage.

All in all, the Socialist Group would have nuanced the package differently, but we welcome this agreement and, as a group, we will support it.

Metin Kazak (ALDE). – (BG) Mr President, I, too, would like to congratulate the rapporteur, Christofer Fjellner, and the other shadow rapporteurs for the successful outcome of the trialogue with the Commission and Council.

I feel that there are a number of important points in this regulation. Firstly, from now on, this scheme will be mostly applied to those countries which are in greatest need, thereby making it more effective.

Secondly, the countries which have signed a free trade agreement with the European Union will be excluded. Nevertheless, the proviso must be made that those which have initiated

negotiations but have still not concluded them within a two-year period will be excluded. We will therefore encourage them to conduct such negotiations with the European Union.

Thirdly, this regulation is linked to numerous strict requirements relating to conditions for achieving international standards in terms of human rights and sustainable growth.

Last but not least, I would like to say how pleased I am about the compromise which has been reached on retaining Parliament's role in the use of the delegated acts procedure, thereby giving us the opportunity to have our final say when making key decisions. I hope that the Commission and Council will also display the same spirit of compromise during the forthcoming debate we will be having on the draft regulation on macro-financial assistance for third countries.

Sajjad Karim (ECR). – Mr President, may I firstly welcome the deal that has been struck between the Council and Parliament, which should allow for transparency and predictability both for the EU's trading partners in the developing world, and for EU importers. The GSP is, of course, an important tool for development, and the new regime should – and hopefully will – seek to concentrate the benefits of trade on those that need them most. 'Trade, not only aid' is a slogan I hear often from them.

May I congratulate my colleague, Mr Fjellner, and all the shadow rapporteurs for the work that they have done on this. I welcome raising the 1% total trade threshold in the GSP+ to 2%. Back in 2005, myself and my colleague, David Martin, moved an amendment to this effect which was approved by this Parliament but was defeated through non-application by the then Commissioner for Trade, using the pretence of WTO non-compliance. Now, of course, in a post-Lisbon era, I hope we will be able to make the most of the opportunity and deliver the advantages of this system to those countries that will qualify, and ensure that they are able to use this to promote human rights, democracy and freedom of speech in the developing world.

There are, of course, some disappointments, but I will reserve those for another day.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is one of the most important instruments for implementing EU policy in relation to developing countries.

The rules currently in force were established by a Council regulation in 2008, and, due to the dynamic pace of social and economic development, it is understandably necessary to update these rules. In connection with the application of new legislative procedure mechanisms under the Treaty of Lisbon, the regulation must also go through the proper procedure in the European Parliament. Even though the draft regulation submitted by the Commission is based on a proven structure applying three separate preference regimes – 1) the standard GSP, 2) the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance known as 'GSP+', and 3) the Everything But Arms (EBA) arrangement – the rules and criteria for granting preferences have been changed, which also results in a different structure of beneficiaries. The list of beneficiaries is reduced first by countries with another agreement on preferential conditions, such as a free trade agreement, secondly, by Overseas Countries and Territories of the EU, the US and Australia and thirdly, by countries which have been classified by the World Bank as a high-income or an upper-middle income country during three consecutive years, such as Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Brazil.

In addition, however, the new classification proposed by the Commission would exclude most Caribbean islands, most Latin American countries and even Namibia, Gabon and Algeria. Meanwhile, economies as powerful as those of India, China, Indonesia and Thailand would temporarily continue to be eligible for the GSP.

I therefore think that the Committee on International Trade's proposal is sensible and correct, recommending as it does the introduction of a transparent system combining a number of indicators for objectively justifying the provision of GSP benefits to selected countries.

Younous Omarjee (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, this reform contains some good provisions. I am thinking about the removal from the system of emerging trading powers, which, one must say, had profited from the advantages of the present mechanism to the detriment of the most vulnerable countries. Therefore, refocusing the benefit of the system on the poorest countries is a good thing.

However, in wanting to correct the excesses of one system, are we not, ultimately, creating some injustices as the application of the sole criterion of income per capita would result in a number of countries, which are neither least developed countries (LDCs) nor low income countries, but which are fragile, finding themselves at risk of being penalised? In particular, I am thinking of the small island developing states, whose vulnerability would have justified granting them a special status.

Ultimately, are there not other less explicit, more unspoken objectives which could be in mind? Namely, to compel the countries that may leave the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) to sign free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements (EPAs), which – to say the least – are not supportive of these countries and do not have unanimous approval?

Vital Moreira (S&D). – (PT) Mr President, Parliament has been called on to debate and vote for this legislative initiative from the Commission, which is based on an agreement already reached with the Council and with the Commission. As the Chair of the Committee on International Trade (INTA), I would have preferred the opposite approach, in other words, to negotiate with the other institutions only after the debate and the vote in plenary. Be that as it may, the agreement that Parliament will debate today and vote on next Wednesday is balanced and positive. While respecting the Commission's objectives, it improves some of the less positive aspects, such as the special safeguard for textiles.

In agreements such as this, no one is ever 100% satisfied. Personally, I continue to object to the expansion of criteria for access to GSP+, as this will allow large economies such as Pakistan and the Philippines, which are very competitive in certain sectors, to have access to this very advantageous scheme. This will be detrimental to poorer economies and to the most vulnerable countries in the European Union itself.

To close, as the Chair of INTA I wish to congratulate our rapporteur, Christofer Fjellner, for his excellent work, and the Danish Presidency, through Ambassador Kelstrup, and the European Commission, represented by Peter Thomson, for their negotiating skills in reaching this agreement that will further the European Union's objectives on this issue.

IN THE CHAIR: ISABELLE DURANT*Vice-President*

Maria Badia i Cutchet (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, I would, first of all, like to reinforce the idea that the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) must be, first and foremost, an instrument that enables the countries that benefit from it to be integrated into international trade and have the opportunity to develop their economies and resources. For this reason, the rules for applying it must be based on criteria that ensure that it is applied in the most fair and balanced way possible to the countries that need it most. However, the current proposal to reform the GSP, on which we will be voting on Wednesday, gives the same treatment to countries that are very well integrated into international trade, with incomes per capita of up to USD 12 000, as it does to vulnerable countries whose incomes per capita are barely more than USD 4 000. For example, the measure excludes countries such as Libya, Namibia, Botswana and a large proportion of Latin American countries which have very little weight in international trade, weakening the EU's strategic, supportive links with the region. For these reasons, I support the amendments that enable some of those vulnerable countries to remain within the framework of the GSP or which, at least, give them some time to adapt to the new situation and, if they wish, to negotiate an agreement with the European Union.

The vote on Wednesday will be the last opportunity to try to amend this agreement so that no country is forced to negotiate a trade agreement with the EU due to being excluded from the GSP. I trust that Parliament will take these proposals into consideration, as they would enable this reform to be more inclusive and balanced, and the EU's trade policy to contribute to creating fair international trade that benefits us all.

Gianluca Susta (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we are duty bound to acknowledge the positive elements in the Commission proposal on which, following the improvements proposed by the Committee on International Trade (INTA), we will be asked to vote.

However, from a methodological point of view, I honestly do not agree with concluding at first reading a matter that will only become effective from 2014 onwards, and which divests Parliament of the power to exert its full potential on such an important issue.

Looking at the substance, I believe that the positive elements in the new regulation are not fully compensated by the persistence of negative issues that adversely affect the interests of industrial sectors that have already been severely tested in Europe by a globalisation governed neither by multilateral rules nor by reciprocity. One positive aspect, however, is the new geographical coverage owing to the principle of differentiation, which provides a boost for the poorest nations. Equally useful is the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance, known as 'GSP+', linked to the implementation of the main international conventions on social, human and environmental rights. Also positive is the safeguard clause for the entire textile and clothing sector, as well as the general clause.

However, the loosening of the financial criteria for the beneficiaries of the GSP+ regime and the exclusion from the graduation mechanism of nations that come under this scheme actually opens the door to unfair competition in relation to already heavily affected sectors, as I said, and gives priority to countries such as Pakistan, whose violations in the field of human rights must not be approved.

In short, there is no doubt that this is a positive regulation, but the issues I mention cast a shadow over other aspects that we wished to consider.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) Madam President, I wish to express my support, as the previous speakers have also done, for the compromise which has been achieved in the negotiations with the Council and Commission on the review of the generalised scheme of tariff preferences. This scheme needed to be redefined in a situation where certain states, such as South Korea, had reached a high level of development which made it no longer possible for them to be granted preferential treatment without this, at the same time putting at a disadvantage industries in Europe and other less developed countries which also benefited from the same scheme.

The new regulations will protect jobs in the European Union, especially in sensitive sectors like textiles. I also hope that we will find a solution for the developing countries which are continuing to face major economic problems, such as Namibia, and which will be excluded when the new regulations in this area come into force.

Josefa Andrés Barea (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, I would like to thank the Committee on International Trade (INTA), the rapporteurs and the shadow rapporteurs for the work they have done. In general terms, we have a good regulation on the special incentive arrangement for sustainable development and good governance (GSP+), which is necessary, specifically, with regard to some measures concerning the monitoring of standards for importing textile products that could be damaging to EU production. We are concerned, however, by the exclusion from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) from 2014 of certain countries that are classified as having upper middle incomes, for example, Latin American countries.

We are concerned as to what is happening with these middle income countries (MICs) that have a lack of diversification in their exports. Why not introduce a criterion of diversification of exports? This could create a two-speed system: countries such as Costa Rica, Cuba and Ecuador would benefit from it, differentiating them from potentially developed countries such as China and Brazil.

I therefore believe that we must support a transition period, and that amendments are going to be tabled during that transition period in order to adapt to that situation and to those countries, and provide the opportunity to begin negotiations and trade agreements with them so that they can benefit from it.

Patrice Tirolien (S&D). – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, faced with the profound changes which our world is experiencing today, the European Union is duty bound to reform its generalised system of preferences.

Like all compromises, this is no exception. Although it is satisfactory from a strictly commercial point of view, it is far from perfect, because we must bear in mind that this regulation is aimed at developing countries.

By developing its new paradigm of differentiation, the Commission says that it wants to refocus its activities to help the poorest countries. At first sight, this seems to be completely acceptable to us.

However, in order to achieve this, the Commission has developed a strictly accounting approach that is based upon the sole criterion of GDP per capita. We can clearly see the

limits of this approach. What about the numerous middle income developing countries whose economies are not very diversified and which are vulnerable to climatic uncertainties?

The compromise found with the Council does not resolve this issue and that is why I call upon my colleagues to vote in favour of the three amendments that will be tabled on this text.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Carl Schlyter (Verts/ALE). – (SV) Madam President, I am more concerned about those who cannot afford to buy any clothes than I am about Europe's textile industry, and in view of the fact that these countries only account for 4% of our imports, I think the most generous conditions possible should apply. I am therefore concerned that we are removing the vulnerability criteria that we had before. If a country does not have a diversified industry, ensuring that it can export its products here without any tariffs is probably a good way to try to help it to establish one.

I am also concerned that we are creating artificial borders within regional free trade areas or cooperation areas where the majority of the countries are poor. We ought also to be able to continue to treat these countries as GSP+ countries. I do not believe that this agreement will help these countries sufficiently, and it is detrimental to move ahead too quickly in decisions at first reading. Many of these countries have not had time to make their voices heard in a positive way, and many that are affected by this have not been able to make their voices heard. We make too many decisions at first reading, and this is yet another example of this.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, the profound changes being proposed for the scheme of generalised tariff preferences need to be assessed in the context of the fundamentalist defence of free trade that guides European Union trade policy.

The number of countries benefiting from the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) has been reduced to less than half as the new criteria exclude from the system countries whose development indicators are not yet fully aligned with recent improvements in their GDP per capita. In many cases, the increase in benefits is associated with an unacceptable application of pressure and blackmail to force the acceptance of the free trade agreements, an approach that we vehemently reject. At the same time, the benefits granted to other countries are being extended in such a way that they will very likely adversely affect countries such as Portugal which are heavily involved in vulnerable sectors, such as textiles and clothing.

A final regrettable point is the way in which the discussion of this dossier has been handled. It is regrettable that, before a debate and vote has even taken place in the plenary, the major political groups, the Commission and the Council have agreed and finalised everything in advance. This being the case, it raises the question: what exactly are we here for?

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Madam President, this debate is about the 2008 scheme currently being reviewed. Some of the proposed changes are self-evidently beneficial, such as the removal of preferences for high-income or upper-middle income countries. However, it appears that powerful exporters such as China, India, Indonesia and Thailand will continue to be part of the scheme, at least for the time being. The changes to the safeguard clauses allowing EU producers the legal right to seek action if they face serious disturbances to their business, or a deterioration in their financial situation, are clearly beneficial. Under the graduation process, whereby a country lost its preference if its exports

of a product exceeded 15% of the GSP total, this figure will now, unfortunately, be raised to 17.5%. In my view, individual states should have the final say over the withholding of preferences, based on the impact of imports on that state, and not on the exporter's percentage of the GSP total.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, one of the amendments put forward raises the problem that if one country in a customs union is a GSP country, and the others are not, this would create imbalances.

I can hardly imagine the opposite being the case: would you, for example, agree to China obtaining 'Everything But Arms' status as soon as it entered into an agreement with, say, Laos or Cambodia, to set up a customs union by a later date, for example, within 25 years? It would be very difficult to imagine that being the right answer to the question. You could say the same of India, Pakistan, Thailand or Malaysia, which do the same with LDCs. Needless to say, this would accelerate preference erosion, with a significant drop in LDC exports. They would be squeezed completely out of the market with such a system.

Several Members have asked why we did not include other criteria. We have given a lot of thought to this issue, but our conclusion is that we have to ensure WTO compatibility, and the use of a single indicator which is internationally recognised is, we think, the best solution. It would be a disservice to developing countries, and to the credentials of the EU as a serious partner, if we added more criteria and, as a result, lost yet another WTO case on GSP. This would lead to a full redesign of the new scheme just after it entered into force. Therefore, we should stick to an internationally recognised, objective way to differentiate among countries.

Another question that has been raised a couple of times relates to using the Human Development Index as an indicator. Again, we looked into the possibility of using the Human Development Index in GSP, but this index is not well suited to this exercise. Human Development Index data are not complete in terms of time or countries covered; also, Human Development Index categories are relative and fixed. This means that countries may develop significantly, and the development needs which the GSP should address may change, but they will remain in the same category. For example, no matter how much China grows, it is likely to stay in the same 'medium' category and thus, basically, keep GSP preferences forever.

These problems are acknowledged by the United Nations itself. They would render the Human Development Index inadequate for the GSP and enhance the risk of a WTO challenge. The Human Development Index is a good index to establish a long-term picture of social development, but it is ill-suited to the short-term analysis of export needs which the GSP requires.

Finally, as regards transition periods, I would like to say that these were the subject of negotiations between Council, Parliament and the Commission up to a few weeks ago, and I am satisfied with the compromise achieved. A number of countries no longer receiving GSP benefits are in free trade negotiations with us. We look forward to their conclusion and recall the EU commitment to assist, pending WTO membership, and to support development as per EU development policy – a debate we will come to later on. Finally, I would like to thank all colleagues for their comments and I look forward to the vote on the GSP tomorrow.

Christofer Fjellner, *rapporteur*. – (SV) Madam President, I would just like to make a few brief comments. I am not surprised that there are certain Members who think that things have progressed too quickly. I do not see this as an indication that the result is bad, however. On the contrary, we have a very broad majority in favour of this compromise here in Parliament, and we have discussed this issue for several years.

Just because someone does not agree with everything, it does not mean that he or she should be able to defer the process and say that we should negotiate until every Member of this Parliament supports the compromise. We have a good compromise, and I think we should safeguard it. The important question that has been discussed most here today is, of course, what criterion we should apply in order to determine whether or not a country can be included in the scheme of generalised tariff preferences.

We did not want a situation in which everyone chooses a criterion that suits their particular favourite country. It is easy to sit in a country and say that I want this particular country to be included and therefore I choose this particular criterion. Instead, we tried to find something that is clear and fair and, above all, that will stand up to the scrutiny of the World Trade Organisation. That is what we have done.

The element that I think most Members here should, in fact, be extremely proud of is the question of ‘everything but arms’, which gives the poor countries of the world free access to the EU’s market. I have discussed this with representatives from the US and they say that it is a splendid idea and they also want ‘everything but arms’ ... and sugar and cocoa and coffee and cotton and bananas.

This is something that Europe is doing and it demonstrates leadership. I think we should continue to try to get the rest of the world to support it. I am proud of the agreement. It provides an efficient, predictable and transparent trading system. We did not use these times of crisis as a reason to be less generous, but rather to be more generous towards the poorest people of the world. That is the result of this agreement.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday, 13 June 2012.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Béla Glattfelder (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) The purpose of the scheme of generalised tariff preferences is to use preferential customs tariffs to allow access to the EU market for those developing countries that need it the most. The current regulation, however, essentially covers all non-European countries other than the developed member countries of the OECD. Among the countries covered, there are several that have more competitive economies than the EU or are granting their own export companies subsidies contrary to WTO rules. In several cases, the competitive advantage is due to subsidised energy prices, which promotes increased CO₂ emissions. In the meantime, the EU is imposing considerable additional costs on companies in order to reach its climate protection goals. These unjustified preferences violate not only the interests of European employees and European industry, but also of states that are truly in need, as their less competitive products are driven out of the market. The new system will terminate, after a transitional period, the preferential treatment of certain highly competitive Asian countries, such as China and Thailand. This is something that I have already demanded on several occasions. I welcome the Commission’s proposal that more competitive or wealthier countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Russia or Brazil, should not be granted preferential customs tariffs. The

new system will cut down the number of countries given preferential treatment by more than half, namely from 176 to about 80. This will be more useful in ensuring that it is indeed developing countries in need that can enjoy preferential access to the market.

20. Public consultations and their availability in all EU languages (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the Commission's statement on public consultations and their availability in all EU languages.

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Madam President, in line with Treaty obligations, the Commission has a long tradition of consulting with those affected by a new policy or initiative and those involved in implementing it. The Commission believes that consultation is an essential tool for producing high-quality proposals and increasing the legitimacy of EU action.

The Commission is constantly striving to ensure that its public consultations are as inclusive as possible and has taken several measures to this end.

Since 2002, all policy initiatives that undergo an impact assessment, and Green Papers, must be preceded by public consultations that observe a set of general principles and minimum standards.

Since 2010, road maps have been published early in the planning process to allow stakeholders to be aware of proposals that the Commission is planning to make, and to be involved and give feedback from the very earliest stages of policy preparation.

Since 2012, the minimum period for open public consultation has been extended from 8 to 12 weeks to facilitate shareholder response.

Currently, the Commission is carrying out a review of its consultation policy. The results of any consequent refinements to the consultation process will be announced in the planned follow-up to the 2010 Smart Regulation Communication. A public consultation seeking stakeholder views on the appropriateness of the existing consultation practices will be launched soon and will feed into the review.

Regarding the language regime, I would emphasise that stakeholders can provide answers to Commission consultations in all official languages. However, while making the consultation documents themselves available in all EU languages could further facilitate stakeholder responses, resources available for translation are very limited, for obvious budgetary reasons. The Commission must therefore prioritise the many competing demands on its translation services.

The Commission is legally obliged to ensure first that all legislative texts are translated into all the official languages of the EU and that other legal obligations are respected. Meeting this obligation takes up the bulk of available translation capacity.

Only once it has fulfilled these obligations can the Commission decide on how to make the most efficient use of the remaining resources. It needs to reconcile a wide variety of competing demands, while making the best and most proportionate use of the resources available.

To the extent allowed by the limited resources available, the Commission seeks therefore to translate as many other documents as possible beyond what is legally mandated. Thus,

for instance, Green Papers and White Papers are, in principle, translated into all languages since they are considered a political priority for consultation purposes.

The Commission is therefore doing all it can to make important consultation documents available in as many EU languages as possible. The fact remains, however, that the Commission does not have the resources to make all consultation documents available in all EU languages.

Róza Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, I am delighted that we are finally holding this debate on public consultations. What you have said sounded very similar to the response received by my fellow Member, Ms Sehnalová, to the question she put to the President of the European Commission, Mr Barroso, regarding public consultations and the fact that the questions are published in very few languages. His answer was that we support multilingualism, but only to the extent of the funds available to us. This completely fails to answer the question, as does what you have said to us, namely, that what is most important for us is for documents to be translated into different languages, but that the number of different languages makes this very expensive. What can be more valuable and important than involving citizens in EU matters? Many of our documents state that European citizens do not feel that they own the European Union because they do not participate in its construction. When Ms Sehnalová and I, as fellow members of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, studied the public consultations carried out by the European Commission, we found that DG Markt (the Internal Market and Services Directorate General) had carried out 26 consultations last year, of which only four were carried out in all the languages. Eighteen of them were carried out only in English. There were very few responses. Only just over 300 people responded to questions concerning the recognition of professional qualifications throughout the European Union, for example, even though this is a key issue and there are 500 million citizens in the EU. It would appear that the European Commission's questions to the public are not actually reaching the public.

I am currently working on a report on alternative dispute resolution, and I decided to carry out public consultations on the subject, only in Poland and working on my own. Over several weeks, I received 425 responses. The European Commission carried out consultations on the same subject throughout the European Union and received 234 responses. This is a very poor reflection on the consultations carried out by the Commission. I spent hardly any money on the consultations, since I used social networking media such as Facebook and Twitter.

I would like to ask whether the European Commission has drawn any conclusions from this, and what it has done since the Kraków Declaration last year, adopted at the Single Market Forum, which had almost 1 500 participants: 'Consultations should be more proactive, organised in partnership with national and local stakeholders, also with NGOs, trade unions, media and other multipliers. They should be organised in all national languages and should be understandable to an average citizen. The citizens should know that their opinions are taken into account and the decisions deriving from the consultations are fully explained'. What has the European Commission done over the past year?

Olga Sehnalová, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (CS) Madam President, I would like to echo the words of Róza Thun und Hohenstein, whom I would also like to thank for her cooperation on a topic which, in my view, touches on the essence of the so-called

democratic deficit of the European Union. It involves nothing less than the way in which European institutions communicate with European citizens and involve them in the decision-making process and the formation of European policies.

Positive steps can certainly be found, such as the European Citizens' Initiative, for example. However, if we are talking about public consultations as a way of involving ordinary citizens, smaller non-profit organisations or public bodies, the Commission's efforts are, in fact, inadequate and merely formal, if we value the voices of ordinary citizens and not just the large organised interest groups.

The public consultations are normally published mainly just in English, are too complicated and, most importantly, most citizens know nothing at all about the possibility of commenting on emerging legislation. Is it really enough for a highly technical document running into dozens of pages to be displayed for a few weeks somewhere on the Commission website, and then to regard the aim of involving citizens – which is a fundamental element of direct democracy in the EU – as having been achieved? I firmly believe that this is wrong, and I am backed up in this by easily obtainable figures. The Single Market Act is considered to be one of the most important documents on the future of the Single Market. According to Commission figures, during the four-month consultation period, a grand total of 248 citizens from the entire EU commented on it in the public consultations.

What was the outcome of this consultation? Dialogue with civil society was the category identified by citizens as the most important of all the 50 priority actions put forward by the Commission. This is natural, because it is the citizens who will be directly affected by the resulting legislation.

A call for better communications was also made at last year's Single Market Forum in Kraków, where the public was able to participate actively in the debate on the future of the Single Market. What is the situation today, on 11 June 2012? The Commission has so far offered 23 public consultations. It could be said that their only common denominator was the English language. In respect of other criteria they varied. Some involved filling in questionnaires, while in others, the citizens had to write their comments in emails. They varied in the scope of the accompanying documents (again mainly in English), the period for which the consultations were open, their graphics and so on.

I firmly believe that by making public consultations available in all of the official languages, improving accessibility and intelligibility and unifying the rules, we will achieve the greater corresponding participation, which, in my opinion, the consultations deserve. I consider this to be a step not only towards greater transparency in the decision-making process, but also towards strengthening fundamental civic rights in the EU. It would also be a nice gift from the Commission for the forthcoming European Year of Citizens.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (ES) Madam President, I am delighted to speak in support of this proposal by my group because the aim of the resolution is for the public consultations conducted by the Commission to be distributed in a better way, and it proposes two improvements.

The first proposal is to use segmentation in order to ensure that it is more accurate and reliable in reaching those who are most concerned and most affected by each subject. The second proposal is that people receive the Commission's proposals in all the EU's official

languages, including minority languages, and that consultations be drawn up in formats that are accessible to people with disabilities.

Making these proposals a reality will improve transparency, opportunities for participation by Europeans and the quality of the legislation we produce. We will also be bringing the European institutions closer to the people, and have more and better opportunities to incorporate the vast amount of knowledge available in European society, both into the Commission's proposals and into the work that we do here on those proposals.

In short, it means better fulfilling the objective of increasing the contribution of Europeans to the decision-making process. Commissioner, this is producing intelligent legislation and legislating better, because segmentation works, and is one of the foundations of modern communication and knowledge management. If, in addition to this, we achieve proactivity, even better.

This was the basis of, for example, the *Zabalik* programme, which enabled us in the Basque Parliament to bring together more than 1 500 organisations as part of its activities, increase downloads of initiatives a hundredfold and website traffic a thousandfold. The Basque Parliament received international recognition in Issy-les-Moulineaux in 2008 as a result, and was invited to report its experiences to the World e-Parliament conference held that year in Brussels by the United Nations Global Centre for Information and Communication Technologies in Parliament.

Zabalik in Basque means 'open': sending the information to those who need it automatically, in a way that is well directed and without having to search for it or ask for it, and it made us more open and will also make the Commission's consultations more open.

Languages and accessibility are even more important. It is a question of rights, diversity and also efficiency. I also have personal experience in this area, because my office sends the new consultations published by the Commission to many sectors every month. In short, we do so monthly so that Basque users have segmented and automated distribution. This is what we send out: information for the whole of Europe, for all parties, and that is what we are asking for in this resolution.

We encourage people to take part in this and join the register of Commission and Parliament interest groups, which has enabled us to discover that not all organisations have the structure to fund professional translations and to send their proposals to the Commission in the correct manner in order to improve them. This is a barrier that must be overcome, and which also affects Europeans with disabilities.

Accessible formats are not recommendable, but rather they are a compulsory requirement if we truly believe the word 'inclusive' in the Europe 2020 strategy. A lack of resources, as you said, Commissioner, is not an argument for denying accessibility for all Europeans. We have to do this in order to improve intelligent legislation. I therefore believe that this resolution could contribute to improving democracy and the quality of our work. Otherwise, we could find ourselves ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Ana Miranda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (PT) Madam President, we are very aware of the issue of languages in our political group. We represent peoples who express themselves in official and co-official EU languages. These peoples speak many of the

languages used in Parliament, as well as other languages that are not as recognised, such as Catalan, Basque, Welsh and Breton.

Citizens often see the European institutions, including Parliament, as distant and separate. They hardly identify with the institutions and are unaware of the work we carry out here. At best, this is because they often think that the EU institutions are entirely dispensable, but, in times of austerity, in times of public austerity, leading to cuts in social rights and basic services, citizens do know that a great deal is decided here.

In this context, any measure that enables Europe to more closely involve our citizens and the peoples we defend is extremely important. Public consultations are one element of participative democracy and should be an opportunity to raise awareness of these European institutions and the work we carry out here, an opportunity to increase participation and also to show that Parliament is the common forum, that the Commission is the European government. We must speak in our own languages, we must communicate in our own languages and in the co-official languages. As my colleague said, people must understand Europe in their own language, to avoid any discrimination as regards their language and their rights.

Language often creates barriers to understanding and to valuing Parliament and the work we do here and in the Commission. Europe says that it is united in diversity. It is also important to be united in linguistic diversity. It is important to be able to communicate with a sailor from Galicia in our language. It is also important to speak to a farmer in Portugal in their own language. It is important to speak to a factory worker in the Basque Country in their own language, and in all of the official European Union languages.

Public consultations are an excellent opportunity to share ideas, information and best practice. We have already seen this with cohesion policy, fisheries policy, agricultural policy and environmental policy. That is why, Commissioner, when you speak of available resources, this cannot be an excuse as the Member States can often share these translation costs. Public consultations are an instrument to encourage participative democracy and must also take account of the shortcomings of people who also have rights.

Oldřich Vlasák, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – (CS) Madam President, I do not in any way doubt the importance of consultations. However, we need to determine the extent to which it is effective to translate all consultations, and what it makes sense to translate. At present, there are, strangely enough, 27 public consultations open. They concern very diverse issues, such as the Transparency Register or the use of anti-monopoly regulations on restrictive commercial practices in merchant shipping, which have only a marginal effect on ordinary people.

The main Commission website offering an overview of consultations is available in all languages, but the related practical information on where to send opinions to or the deadlines for sending in opinions is usually only in English. It is paradoxical that the actual consultation texts are again, in some cases, in all of the languages. This means that the EU often translates ten-page technical texts but is unable, at the same time, to translate one page of instructions. We therefore need to determine whether we are asking the right question about public consultations.

Is the key issue for the consultation document to be translated into all of the official languages and put up for show on the web portal, or do we really want to learn from all interested parties what they think about a proposal? Is the opinion of one farmer based on

specific personal experience of key importance for our activities, rather than the thoroughly debated opinion of a national agrarian chamber? Do we have the resources and the time to translate all communications into all languages, or would it be more efficient to open a discussion via the information offices of the Commission and Parliament only on key questions in individual states, and to gather the relevant responses?

I firmly believe that if we are really interested in the opinions of those affected by European policy, and we are not just talking about opinion polls, we should adopt a more active approach towards the interested partners and their national and European associations. The basic information should be available in all languages, but technical questions directed towards a specialist public can be published in just one language. That is my opinion.

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

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE), *Blue-card question.* – (ES) Madam President, I would like to ask you whether, based on the same wording and arguments, you would agree to all initiatives in Parliament being in just one language, because that would make our work easier. I have found with some initiatives on which there has been consultation, and which have received many more responses from organisations outside the sector, that they found things easier because they have an infrastructure or they know the workings of the Commission and have been able to make more contributions than the sector itself.

Oldřich Vlasák (ECR), *Blue-card answer.* – (CS) I do not in any way question the principle of consultations. In my opinion, we need to communicate with people who are addressing European institutions in their native tongue. It is not necessary, however, where there is a technical query, that is to say a query from a qualified worker or scientist, to translate these things into other languages. These are professional matters and here we can save on professional translations, and it will suffice for the consultation or translation to be in only one language, or three languages. Translations into all languages are unnecessary here.

John Stuart Agnew, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – Madam President, I would like to thank the 15 MEPs who have bothered to turn up to this debate, which says a little about the state of democracy in the European Union.

Of course, the EU has long since become the great arbiter of law when compared to the Parliaments of Member States. In the United Kingdom, this is most noticeable in the number of acts of Parliament that are now passed. Before we entered the then EEC, typically Parliament would pass 60 to 70 acts. Today, it is typically around 25. By contrast, our national parliaments now regurgitate thousands of pages of regulations forced on them by the European institutions.

This EU Parliament, as evidenced by the inexorable decline in turnout at European elections, continues to move ever further away from the people – real people, real voters. As a matter of principle, UKIP always opposes the profligate waste of this Parliament and of the EU. We know only too well that the EU represents one of the greatest pork barrels ever conceived. Vast sums extracted from the pockets of hard-pressed and hard-working taxpayers all over Europe are poured into this bottomless barrel. We oppose at every turn the larcenous activities of the EU klepto-state. We shall go on doing it, day in and day out.

But, every now and again, we can see the benefit of some expenditure. You are looking at me in great surprise, but the fact is that having access to what is being done in their name is a matter of vital interest to every taxpayer in the European Union. If public consultations are not to be available in all of the official languages of the EU, millions of its citizens will

be deprived of access to what is being done in their name, and will be deprived of the ability to take part. Whilst the Commission would doubtless be much happier if large numbers of taxpayers were excluded from much of what is going on, we say that the taxpayer must always be able to access the work of the Council and the Commission. Only thus can taxpayer representatives hold them to account for all the corruption and waste that we know takes place.

Of course, there is one low-cost solution, and actually I have heard it two or three times this evening. Do it all in English! That would promote the learning of English across Europe, much to the benefit of young people, as it is the lingua franca of so much of the world's activities. But that might upset the French, and we cannot do that, can we? Because this place exists to keep the French happy.

Marie-Christine Vergiat, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (FR) Madam President, I rather get the impression that at this point we are keeping the English happy ...

The European Union is currently experiencing a major political and democratic crisis. Its citizens have increasingly less confidence in its institutions. The financial crisis, its economic and social consequences and the European Union's method of responding to it using austerity measures, which impact, first and foremost on the people, serve only to exacerbate the issue.

Once again, you give fine speeches, but the reality is that the European institutions are becoming increasingly incapable of communicating or even entering into dialogue with most citizens. Moreover, do they really want to? To listen to you, one can only wonder. Public consultations should be a key instrument in this dialogue, but the question remains as to how we reach out to European citizens, particularly those who are most affected by the proposed measures, whatever their socio-professional background.

To achieve this, the starting point is to speak to them in their native language and, at the very least, in the official languages of the European Union. However, we are witnessing a gradual drift where this is concerned. Anyone who needs convincing of this need only visit the Commission's official websites. Increasing numbers of documents are only available in English. Some can be found in English and French and fewer still in French, English and German. As for translations into other languages, these are becoming increasingly rare.

With 2013 about to be announced as the European Year of Citizens, the time has come to put a stop to this. We must give ourselves the means to convey European Union policies to all citizens. We must prioritise this and make it a budgetary priority as well.

To accept responses in all languages when information is not available in all languages is pure hypocrisy. It is time to take this matter seriously.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Madam President, it is quite simply normal and self-evident that public consultation documents should be available in all the official languages of the European Union. Really, it should not be necessary for the Commission to have to make a statement on this or for there to be a debate on this issue here in Parliament, but Commissioner De Gucht now tells us that the Commission no longer has sufficient funds to translate all relevant documents into all the official languages. I also fear that this was a somewhat euphemistic wording on the Commissioner's part, as the necessary documents are mostly available in only one language.

That is not an acceptable situation, the more so given that the Commission is supposed to be making use of precisely this tool of public consultation in order to refine the regulatory process while reducing the chasm between the citizens and European officialdom. These public consultations are obviously no magic wand in themselves, but it is actually very annoying to have to observe how a mechanism that is a positive thing in itself is doomed to be a useless measure in many Member States because the citizens will be unable to consult the necessary documents in the official language of their country. The rule will therefore have to be that all European Union public documents must be available in all the official languages, and arguments based on the budget are unacceptable, as far as I am concerned.

If we look at the EU's budget, we can see that there are more than enough headings where savings and cuts can be made. The costs, meanwhile, for relevant important documents, such as those for public consultations, represent only a fraction of what could be saved in other headings in the budget.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, we decided to table this oral question because the issue is particularly important. We have always strived to bring citizens closer to the EU institutions. We do so in many ways, through the visitors to Parliament, through our local actions, using all the means of communication that our timescales allow us. We do this with constant echoes in all our resolutions; we do so, too, with the Commission's public consultations.

The Commission often uses these consultations to form the basis of their communications to Parliament and other EU institutions. In other words, the Commission bases its work on the responses it gets. Where, then, is the problem? The problem is that often, the results of these consultations are objectively embarrassing. A few dozen answers, sometimes even just single figures, representing the half a billion citizens that make up the European Union. Truly embarrassing. In 2011, the Commission had already committed to reviewing its consultation policy but to date, that is, mid-2012, we have neither seen nor heard anything. It is not a matter of lengthening timescales: we could even do it for 365 days, but the results would be the same.

One of the most obvious problems is the use of languages. We very seldom go beyond the use of English, and hardly ever use any other languages apart from English, French and German. My mother could never take part in the consultations because she does not know any of the three languages in question and many of our citizens are in a similar position to her. It is not just a matter of ignorance, it is also a matter of the values we believe in and on which we have based our Union. Multilingualism, Commissioner, is one of them.

Of course it is important to be competent in languages, but we have 23 of them, and why should a Portuguese, an Italian or a Lithuanian not find out about the Commission's consultation in their own language? Of course, the lack of answers does not only depend on language but we have to start somewhere. Language is not only a great place to start but, Commissioner, also becomes a priority because, if we were to continue in this way, we might just as well make savings at the root by abolishing this instrument since we are making such a terrible impression.

I want to conclude with a question to you, Commissioner: if you were in charge of a communication company, would the results of this communication satisfy you and your company?

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) Madam President, multilingualism is vital so that citizens can exercise their right guaranteed by the Treaty of Lisbon allowing them to participate democratically in EU legislation. We deplore that only seven of the 18 consultations currently in progress in 2012 are in all the official EU languages, with the rest appearing in English only. Unfortunately, important areas such as the budget, energy, transport, taxation, the internal market, consumer rights, food safety and fishing are not available in all the official EU languages.

We welcome the ‘Your Voice in Europe’ website that has been created, specifically intended for interactive policy making, improving European governance and introducing better regulation. Unfortunately, of the 35 areas on the ‘Your Voice in Europe’ website, four appear in the 23 official EU languages, eight in 22 of the official languages, four in English, French and German only, two in English and French only, one in English and German, and 16 in English only.

Commissioner, if the Commission does not have sufficient resources available to provide the documents in all the official EU languages, I think that it is time for you to take on more lawyer-linguists for all the official languages of the European Union.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, the problem of the availability of public consultations in the various EU languages is, unfortunately, not a new one. In my view, it is a key issue, which is why I have not only submitted several written questions to the Commission since 2008, but I have also personally written to Mr Barroso about this matter.

Indeed, the Commission must conform to the principle of equal treatment and equal access to information for all European citizens, as the General Court of the European Union recognised in its ruling of 20 November 2008.

I was not at all satisfied with the Commission’s response, according to which public consultations do not claim to provide an entirely representative picture of all opinions. According to this response, the Commission is taking into account the fact that certain stances and views may be over-represented to the detriment of others. This is not a response at all.

I wonder which criteria one could use to measure an over-representation of the European population. If written consultations are not representative because they are only available in English, for example, then they are not fulfilling their objective of consulting European citizens. As such, the outcome gives a poor indication and should therefore not be used by the Commission.

If we wish to keep using written consultations as a key tool for the Commission’s legislative proposals, we must ensure that they uphold the principles of democracy, transparency and fairness for all citizens. Consequently, if the Commission chooses to use written consultations, it must assume responsibility and provide the necessary resources for multilingualism and for the translation of questionnaires.

To conclude, I would like to add that multilingualism is not the only obstacle. We would also have to look into the time limits for submitting contributions, which are too short, as well as the few means used by the Commission to convey information on these consultations, which, unfortunately, are mainly accessible only to those in the know.

Salvatore Iacolino (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt that at this time of great difficulty, with such an overwhelming financial and economic crisis, the Commissioner might feel there are other policy priorities to debate and discuss. Because otherwise, the issue of multilingualism, the issue of cultural wealth, the issue of democratic participation should already have been effectively resolved, but they have not.

The European Union undoubtedly has union at a monetary level, while it does not yet at a fiscal or political level, and there is no doubt that the denial of rights of citizenship includes denial of the right to participation and information. What should consultation be for, if not to provide a procedure, a tool to help citizens understand what is happening and, through the occasional heated exchange of ideas, through proper debate, to come up with concrete proposals for the decisions that will then be taken by the European institutions?

Standing between the goal and the procedures that have been identified, there is probably a strong political will on the part of the Commission. Yet there are a number of innovative opportunities, including websites, there are a number of tangible opportunities that could ensure that the cultural wealth – which should be encouraged – has a tangible opportunity for growth.

Otherwise, there will not be much point in further extending the boundaries of the European Union, and it will not be possible to guarantee the social cohesion that is created through an open challenge towards the territory. It is true, we must combine the instrument of political consultations with the effectiveness of parliamentary activities in the best possible way, and we still need to make optimum use of resources in a context where they need to be used rationally.

Nevertheless, Madam President, if Parliament really wishes to be the home for all EU citizens, much more needs to be done and we call upon the Commission to make a great effort in this direction.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, as other Members have said, the public consultations website asks people to participate in the European political process. Consultations should therefore be a useful and effective tool for strengthening governance, for strengthening democratic participation, helping citizens to become aware of, and take responsibility for, the sense of European citizenship and, first and foremost, to become decision makers in Europe.

However, in point of fact, this is just a slogan, because these consultations are often only available in one language, or at most in three. I wish to give a very simple example. There is an important ongoing consultation for young people, namely, the consultation on internships. We have been saying for months that youth unemployment has become a serious problem for the European Union, given that one young person in four in Europe is out of work. There are countries – I am thinking of Greece, of Spain, but also of Italy, my country – where almost 50% of young people are jobless, while we have been saying that there are about 7 million young people in Europe between the age of 14 and 24 who do not work and do not study. Nevertheless, we clearly expect these 7 million young people to be polyglots. These young people, if they want to have their say on internships, for example, have to know more than three EU languages in any case. This is clearly ridiculous.

I would also like to offer a practical suggestion. It depends on what type of consultation it is. If it is a consultation about eurobonds, three languages may be enough. However, if we are consulting European citizens, for example, on the European Year for Active Ageing or

on internships for young people, on very simple and very practical topics, that is, we must do so by giving them the chance to answer in any EU language.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Katarína Neveďalová (S&D). – (SK) Madam President, the EU's motto is 'Unity in Diversity', and one of the diversities which defines the EU, in my opinion, is its multilingualism, and I therefore cannot believe that we are sitting here this evening and discussing whether all 500 million European citizens really need to have an equal opportunity to discuss matters that are decided at European level in their own language, the language they understand. It now depends on whether this is an official or an unofficial EU language. We can talk about that, but it is naturally important for people to have access to this, so that they can understand what we, the politicians, are debating. You know, when you say you do not have enough money for this, I would like to propose a procedure – when you are deciding on some measure in the future or when you want to launch a public consultation, take a large hat and we can throw 23 large balls into it with the name of a language on each ball, and we can pick out one, two or three balls depending on how much money we have for the consultation in question, and on the basis of this we will choose the language in which we are going to present the consultation to the public and the citizens of the EU, because the languages that are chosen by you are, in fact, not understood at all by most European citizens.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, the European institutions' almost daily attacks on the principle of multilingualism are unacceptable. There are countless examples, starting with the conditions under which the work of Parliament itself is conducted and including the information and opportunities to participate made available to the citizens of the different Member States in particular processes.

The situation has deteriorated considerably following cuts to the translation budget and we are troubled to hear both the Commissioner's words today and the proposals under discussion for more drastic cuts in the future. This is even more serious when, as the citizens' right to participate is being restricted by the attack on multilingualism, the Member States' sovereignty is being trampled as power is being drained from the representative structures closest to citizens and the EU's areas of competence and intervention are being expanded. Undeniably, democracy itself is at risk.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Madam President, a public consultation should, as its very name suggests, be public. I respect the Commission's efforts to table the problem, of course, and to communicate it in a language that is accessible to most citizens who speak a foreign language. English is used universally as one of the most widely spoken languages in the EU. Despite this, the vast majority of our citizens use other languages and do not speak English. If, therefore, we wish to achieve the objective that public consultations are supposed to achieve, we need to find mechanisms for approaching people, because people will not just follow our requirements. If our citizens are to be aware of the EU as their own official body, institution or state, and the European Commission as an institution that communicates with them, then the Commission must learn to communicate with people in the languages which they speak. An effort should therefore be made, perhaps with the help of national governments, to develop establishments, institutions and mechanisms that will help to disseminate the topics of public consultations to individual countries and to individual citizens.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – (FR) Madam President, I have a great deal of sympathy for many of the arguments that have been developed in this debate. It is true that the lack of languages damages the representativeness and ‘direct democracy’ element of these consultations. However, it is a question of money. We do not have the necessary translators to organise all of these consultations in all of the official languages of the European Union, 23 in total. Moreover, this is a problem that we come across in many other procedures.

You are part of the budgetary authority. Therefore, Parliament should not settle for simply debating this matter, but should also demand that the necessary funds are made available in the annual and multiannual budgets. This, therefore, depends much more on you than on us. We can only use the translators that you give us.

Here, then, is my response: if you do what is needed to give us more translators, it will be possible to organise more consultations in all of the languages and it will also, for example, be possible to translate the trade agreements that I am supposed to sign with third countries much more quickly.

President. – The motions for resolutions to be tabled in accordance with Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure will be announced at a later date.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 14 June 2012, at 12.00.

21. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

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

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – Madam President, the 2011 European multiple sclerosis (MS) barometer indicates an alarming lack of understanding or support for the more than 600 000 people who suffer from this disease.

While, in the past, the problems were mainly found in Central and Eastern Europe, we are now observing with great concern a degrading of existing care in Western Europe too.

Raising public awareness of MS is crucial to making positive changes to the lives of people living with this disease. Raising funds for research and care, addressing discrimination at work, and advocating policy change by decision makers all depend on prior awareness and understanding of multiple sclerosis.

Colleagues, you can help to raise awareness of this disease by signing Written Declaration No 20 on multiple sclerosis.

Alajos Mészáros (PPE). – (HU) Madam President, 4 June marked the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, a treaty that figuratively moved millions of European citizens from one country to another without their leaving their homelands, causing an unprecedented increase in the number of EU citizens who live with minority status to this day. Despite its acute sensitivity for respect for human rights worldwide, the EU is unwilling to draft consistent, high-quality framework legislation on European minorities for its approximately 40 million minority citizens. These citizens are, in terms of language, education and culture, at the whim of the nation states they live in, and therefore live under very different conditions, which are often incompatible with European values.

There are countless examples of atrocities suffered by minorities: just last month, young Hungarian nationals were beaten in the Slovakian capital for speaking in their mother tongue. In addition to human rights, Article 2 of the Treaty of Lisbon guarantees the rights of persons belonging to minorities. I find that we are not doing enough, or are barely even doing anything at all, to implement these values in practice.

I would welcome it if the Commission could find the time between its numerous important duties to examine the possibility of ensuring that historic minorities can enjoy equal protection of their collective rights in the various Member States.

Anna Záborská (PPE). – (SK) Madam President, at this meeting, we will again be talking about budget discipline and reducing the excessive deficits of Member States. At the same time, however, we will be discussing artificial job creation with the use of public funds. In order to put this into practice, the Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society has tabled a motion replete with requests that run into the billions. This is not political schizophrenia, however. A majority in this Parliament share a clear aim, which is a federal Europe. A small increase in expenditure – while declaring an effort to make savings – will lead to the necessary new sources. A German cushion in the form of eurobonds does not amount to a rejection, but a condition. If there is a joint debt, then there is also a joint budget. If the euro area then has one budget, it will already comprise a single state. This is a serious decision, and I think we should ask our citizens for their views on the matter.

Arkadiusz Tomasz Bratkowski (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, it is vital for Poland and Europe to diversify their energy suppliers. While we are anxious to create an independent energy policy, the actions of some Member States are taking us in the opposite direction. The statistics leave no room for doubt. Russia continues to be the largest supplier of gas and oil, while, according to the International Energy Agency, the Union's dependence on fuel imports in 2030 could be as high as 67%.

This means that shale gas is a great opportunity for Europe and Poland. Initial estimates indicate the high potential of its deposits. Unfortunately, substantive debate on the subject centres mainly around accusations of environmental degradation. In response, the experts point to data on advanced technologies and tougher environmental protection legislation, but this message is met with criticism. What I would like to ask, therefore, is which interest groups stand to benefit from the propagation of these myths? Parliament should quickly adopt a clear position on shale gas and allow Member States to use the resources they possess.

María Muñoz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, this is about coal, the coal which miners in Spain are not mining because they are on strike, due to the fact that, despite European legislation allowing aid for the viability of mining in Spain and the rest of Europe, the Spanish Government has suspended aid, and has cut aid this year by 63%. In this House, where I, my colleague, Antonio Massip, and other Members from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament have spoken so many times on the importance of coal as a strategic energy resource in Europe, we are confronted with coal being at risk.

We must rescue the Spanish coal mining industry from the brutal cuts that are threatening to wipe it out; we must rescue the 30 000 families who live directly or indirectly on coal; we must rescue the EU investments in CO₂ capture technologies, which could make coal into green energy; we must rescue jobs in areas where the alternatives in terms of work

and the economy are not at all easy; and, above all, we must rescue coal, which is native to the EU, from the steamroller of a right-wing government that has no social awareness and has no problems with negotiating the rescue of the financial sector while abandoning a productive sector such as coal to its fate.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Madam President, we have another banking bailout and Spain is repeating the Irish mistake. We have to ask the questions why have Spanish bond yields increased today and why is it costing Italy more to borrow money? It is because of the toxic link between insolvent banks and sovereign states that are already under significant pressure.

Spain, like Ireland, has piled its debt onto the shoulders of its citizens. Ireland, despite the fact that its debt-to-GNP ratio will peak at 150% next year, still continues to pay unsecured bondholders. Unfortunately for Spain, it, too, has joined the club. Yes, there are some cosmetic differences and some face-saving for Spain. As a large country, it was able to demand and get those few extra crumbs from the table, but that, in the final analysis, is all it amounts to.

Surely EU leaders can see that we are fast approaching the end of the line. Yes, we have bought some time, but the feel-good factor did not last past lunchtime today. We need emergency scaffolding to prop up the crumbling infrastructure of the euro right now and, in my view, the minimum required is some kind of banking union, a deposit-interest guarantee scheme, EU-wide banking supervision and regulation and, crucially, some kind of bank resolution scheme.

Ana Miranda (Verts/ALE). – Madam President, as a Member of this Parliament, and as a woman, I am personally concerned about the fact that Ms Leyla Zana has been sentenced to ten years in prison in Turkey.

Leyla Zana is a member of the National Assembly of Turkey. She is a non-violent ambassador of the Kurdish people and of women in particular. She has also been nominated for the Nobel peace prize on several occasions and she has been awarded Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought.

There are nine charges against her – some of them concerning speeches made in this Parliament. We believe that these accusations are unfounded. For all of these reasons, I myself and other MEPs in this Parliament sent a letter to Ms Ashton, and now also request that this Parliament condemn the verdict and deploy all necessary means to ensure that Turkey re-establishes Ms Leyla Zana's civil and political rights.

Claudio Morganti (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this week we are in France for the usual scandalous monthly trip, whereas most of our activities take place in Brussels. In the very capital of Belgium, which would also like to tout itself as the capital of Europe, yet another serious episode occurred recently that underlines the dangerous drift that the city has taken. Dozens of young Muslims literally attacked a police officer whose only offence had been to take into custody an Arab woman who had refused to show her face as prescribed by law. There are several neighbourhoods where the police are afraid to intervene, neighbourhoods where not a single person of Belgian origin can be found. The fact that the most common first name for a newborn baby is Mohammed should give us pause for thought.

This Parliament is always ready to have its say on various issues, but perhaps it would also be a good idea to reflect on the situation in Brussels, which runs the risk of being the reflection of a future Europe that we absolutely do not want.

Takis Hadjigeorgiou (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, I wish to speak on a matter raised earlier by Ms Miranda in connection with the ten-year term of imprisonment to which Leyla Zana has been sentenced by a Turkish court. I shall not repeat points already made; however, I do wish to emphasise that Ms Zana defends human rights in Turkey, fights for the rights of Kurds in Turkey and has been awarded the Sakharov prize by this Parliament. We demand that Parliament monitor these proceedings, ask the Turkish Government to take appropriate measures to quash this sentence and monitor any new developments in the course of the appeal which I believe that Leyla Zana will lodge.

Diane Dodds (NI). – Madam President, in recent days, we in the United Kingdom and across the Commonwealth have been celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, marking her 60 years as monarch and her steadfast selfless service.

I believe it fitting that this House join with parliaments and politicians across the world in marking this significant milestone by sending warmest congratulations to Her Majesty and to His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh on this Diamond Jubilee.

We can all greatly learn from Her Majesty's example. Her life and reign epitomise devotion to duty, commitment, sacrifice, courage and impeccable judgment. In return, she has the affection, love and respect of people right across the world.

We in Northern Ireland look forward to a visit from Her Majesty later this month. It will be our opportunity to celebrate, to thank her for her reign over us and to wish her well in the years ahead.

For those of us from the United Kingdom, our hope and prayer remains the same. God Save the Queen!

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) Madam President, on the day when it was announced that Spanish banks are going to receive EUR 100 billion as a bailout, in Bucharest, the economic crisis is being accompanied by a political one. There is an economic recession, but the prime minister thinks that the main priority is his clash with the president over Romania's representation in the Council. The prime minister has actually also involved parliament in this dispute, at the risk of triggering considerable instability. At present, there is the prospect of the regime going through a crisis to accompany the economic crisis. However, I believe that what we need now is consensus and compromise, not confrontation. This is why, on behalf of the citizens whom I represent in Parliament, I call on the prime minister and president to reach a sensible compromise on representing Romania in the Council without making an issue of it and introducing political instability against the backdrop of an economic crisis.

Edit Bauer (PPE). – (HU) Madam President, I would like to call attention to two instances of violations of rights. The first is the case of Hedvig Malina, who was beaten six years ago for speaking Hungarian in Nitra, Slovakia. Her case dragged on for a long time, until she eventually appealed to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. In the end, the case was withdrawn after a brief apology by the former government. The case was closed and the perpetrators got away with impunity, but the victim did not.

When a socialist government came into power again, the Public Prosecutor's office resumed proceedings against the victim. She was accused of lying about the beating. After a settlement and apology by the former government, the Public Prosecutor's office is now harassing the victim again. She has now been summoned for an evaluation of, as utterly absurd as it may seem, her psychological state six years ago.

While the EU is building an area of security and justice, the new Slovak Government is reinforcing legal uncertainty. And those at the receiving end are members of the minorities.

We must not forget about the case of Leyla Zana either, as mentioned by my fellow Members, and I ask the President of Parliament to raise his voice and bring his authority to bear to ensure that such incidents cannot occur.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) Madam President, there is one major cause of the protracted impasse which Europe is going through: the lack of concerted action. Unfortunately, the vacuum created by the great absence of solidarity, a feature of the European project, is being successfully filled by national interests. Germany provides the most telling example of this with its opposition to the issuing of bonds.

To ensure its survival, the European Union needs to adopt urgent, credible measures with the main aim of reducing social inequalities and restoring European citizens' confidence in the benefits of European integration. The austerity measures promoted by certain national governments have only served to widen social inequalities. On this point, as Stiglitz comments in a recently published article, inequality results in profound neglect of human potential, which hinders consumption and heightens the tensions in society. This is precisely what the Great Depression did last century as a result of the huge cuts in the funding of basic services and the unprecedented rise in unemployment; in other words, it exacerbated the inequalities. It is time for us to learn this lesson from history and adopt bold measures to stimulate the economy, such as the financial transaction tax and the issuing of bonds.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – Madam President, Serbian citizens elected a new president on 20 May 2012. Mr Tomislav Nikolić pledged throughout his campaign that he will keep Serbia firmly on the path towards EU membership.

Given Mr Nikolić's nationalist past, all regional leaders in the EU should closely monitor his first acts as President. Serbia will continue to have a reliable and strong partner in Brussels and in Parliament if its commitment to regional reconciliation and good neighbourly relations develops further.

Mr Nikolić's visit to Brussels on 14 June 2012 is of great importance for the whole of the Western Balkans as well.

At the same time, the Serbian Parliament parties need to get their act together and form an efficient government soon. I hope that the outcome of the ongoing negotiations will result in a deal that brings a stable and strong pro-European parliamentary majority.

I hope that the new National Assembly will execute its oversight powers more aggressively in the future. Serbia needs an active parliament if it is to meet its challenges in the European integration processes. The new government will need to deal decisively with the debt crisis, unemployment and, above all, with the systemic corruption which is blocking the Serbian economy and Serbia's society.

I hope that accession negotiations with Serbia will open fairly soon, because Serbian leaders will be in a position to tackle the country's problems in a more transparent and efficient way.

Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE). – (GA) Madam President, I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to raise an important matter, namely that of car rental, especially at this time when many families in the Union are going on holiday and are under financial pressure.

Many car rental companies require consumers to pay for a full tank of fuel prior to the rental. This is irrespective of the fact that the consumer may return the car to the rental company with fuel remaining and the consumer will not be – and is not – reimbursed. In many cases, holidaymakers rent a car to travel to their destination, return it at the end of their stay and use very little petrol but must pay for a full tank. This practice is unfair, it is unacceptable and indeed it is extortionist.

I strongly believe that the Commission should investigate this matter to see if this practice is contrary to the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive and the Unfair Contract Terms Directive. It is not good enough to leave enforcement to national authorities, as the practice appears to be commonplace across many EU Member States. I would call on the Commission to investigate this.

Marisa Matias (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, this weekend, we received another request to save a private bank. Once again, they argue that this is to prevent contagion of the euro area. I ask if we have learnt nothing. Greece, Portugal, Ireland and now Spain and still the contagion spreads. What is the containment radius of this contagion that will destroy us? It must already be clear that this policy does not work. The same government leaders who say there is no money for culture, education, health and public goods make money appear as if by magic when the banks or markets ask for it. This economic policy is not a cure; it is toxic for growth, for jobs, for the European economy and for social Europe. The markets demand and the governments obey and blackmail the poor, as governments are doing with Greece at the moment, during an election.

I sincerely hope that, for the good of us all, the Greek people do not allow themselves to be blackmailed next Sunday and they teach us a lesson, because this recipe, Madam President, is a recipe for disaster.

Georgios Koumoutsakos (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, the European vision is becoming clouded. More and more European citizens are either moving away from or are indifferent to a unified Europe. Extremist, ethnic and anti-European forces are gaining a political foothold in more and more European countries. If this trend continues, we shall have a nightmarishly different European Parliament here in 2014. This trend therefore needs to be stopped and, in order to stop it, we need growth, not just strict budgetary discipline; jobs, not just unemployment.

This is a wager that the whole of Europe needs to win, especially those who clearly play a leading role in Europe. These countries and these forces have assumed a huge historic responsibility. Europe cannot continue on the course which it appears to be on. We cannot allow such forces to win over the hearts and minds of European citizens.

IN THE CHAIR: OTHMAR KARAS

Vice-President

Evelyn Regner (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to draw the House's attention to serious violations of trade union rights, and specifically the right to strike, in Turkey. In the early hours of 31 May, the governing Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) passed a law banning strikes and lock-outs in the aviation sector. When this legislative initiative became public knowledge, hundreds of unionised employees of Turkish Airlines went on strike, resulting in around 200 flight cancellations. Turkish Airlines responded by sacking 305 employees. Furthermore, the manner of giving notice was

unlawful, according to union sources, as the workers were sacked by text message. A further 150 workers are also due to be given their notice.

In Turkey, the right to strike is massively restricted, and tied to various requirements. There is a general ban on sympathy strikes, general strikes, work-to-rule actions and strikes as a result of failure to adhere to collective agreements. We need to draw attention to the dramatic plight of trade union rights in Turkey, a country that hopes to accede to the European Union, and send that country a strong message that the Copenhagen criteria must be observed.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, the decisions adopted by the Council of Ministers last Thursday on Schengen have caused a great deal of discussion and reaction. I shall not comment on the change to the legal regime, which will be debated in detail in plenary here tomorrow morning. However, I do wish to comment on the impressions created and the reactions in the Greek press the following day. As you know, these decisions were commented on as the precursor to the resumption of border controls in Greece and as the precursor to Greece's exit from the Schengen area; not even a suspicion of this is mentioned in the Council text. There is nothing in it that begs such a conclusion. However, this impression was created and, of course, mistaken impressions send out the wrong message and we cannot safely guard the external borders of the Union on the basis of misunderstandings. We trust that this will only be done on the basis of solidarity policies and, with a new government in Greece on 18 June, led by New Democracy, new and more measures will be taken to stem the flow of illegal immigrants. However, we need Europe to take similar measures.

Inés Ayala Sender (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to express my solidarity with the workers in the mining sector in Asturias, Castilla-León and Aragón, in Spain, who are fighting to keep jobs for thousands of workers, their families and entire regions, which owe their very nature, appeal and development to having historically provided coal and energy to the rest of society.

Mr Rajoy and Mr Soria's government is denying them aid already approved by the European Union and budgeted, when they have surplus funds and other sources that are entirely acceptable. This is being done, moreover, citing the EU's rejection of and indifference to coal, which we know is not true, because tomorrow we will adopt Ms Herczog's report, which itself advocates diversification to safeguard the EU's independence and energy leadership in the global market.

I do not, therefore, see the EU dispensing with coal as a sector within that global dialogue. Also, last week, the 17th European Round Table on Coal put forward the proposals for the Horizon 2020 programme for coal, so we reject the idea that support is not continuing as regards aid for the coal sector in Spain.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, I would like to speak to you about how the work of our institution is organised.

The Treaties state that Parliament's plenary votes should be held mainly in Strasbourg. Additional part-sessions should only be held if it is not physically possible to vote on all texts in Strasbourg. Yet, regrettably, we can see that the agendas for our part-sessions in Strasbourg are shrinking from month to month, while, on the other hand, those for the additional part-sessions in Brussels are growing from one additional part-session to another.

For example, we saw that the budget discharges were voted on in Brussels in 2011 and 2012. The fact is that this is not what is stated in the Treaties.

Mr President, I would like to say to you that our legislative work is organised around the plenary sittings in Strasbourg and I wish that the political groups and Parliament's administration – Parliament's administration is very important as it has the power to make and undo decisions without consulting Members and I would like to point out that it is Members who make decisions and not always officials – would enforce the operating rules, in order to comply with the Treaties and to ensure that proper legislative procedures are followed.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D). – (LV) Mr President, what would we do if there were no clowns on Earth? In Latvia, they are even sometimes appointed ministers. One such especially prolific clown became a minister in the Latvian Government, and immediately came up with a new law. He decided to test the loyalty of children of the residents of Latvia.

Tell me, please, is it possible to test the loyalty of children? Is this not a clown's trick, or perhaps a crime called 'incitement of international hatred'? If this were to happen in the Republic of Congo, we at the European Parliament would prepare a resolution, but if it happens in the European Union, in Latvia, it is considered normal.

Am I mistaken?

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, this year, one of the Europa Nostra Grand Prix awards given out by the European Commission and Europa Nostra went to 80-year-old Paraschiva Kovacs, a member of the Hungarian community of Transylvania, for her successful work in raising awareness of Szekler carved wooden gates and their importance as community symbols, and more specifically for saving such gates with the involvement of young people. The recognition of the work of this retired teacher is a typical example of unity and togetherness between generations, and the preservation of traditions.

The reason why this is important to the preservation of our European system of values is that members of this same community cast their ballots in the local government elections in Romania yesterday. I cannot go into detail on the results here, but I would like to stress the importance to minorities of the full and undivided preservation of our values, and of ensuring that we do not jeopardise them and our own future through uncertainty and discord.

Ricardo Cortés Lastra (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I would also like to use the one minute that Parliament affords us in order to condemn the mining situation in Asturias, Aragón and Castilla-León.

The miners' situation is genuinely drastic and, moreover, the aid approved by Parliament until 2018 is being drastically cut by the Spanish Government. Thousands of miners' families are currently on the streets striking against the measures taken by the Spanish Government, which, while indiscriminately cutting aid to miners, is nevertheless giving large amounts of aid to banking in Spain.

Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, according to the latest data supplied by the World Bank, there is a growing global waste management crisis. Based on the estimates provided, the volume of waste generated by urban populations will rise from the current level of 1.3 billion tonnes per year to 2.2 billion tonnes by 2025, which will also be accompanied by an increase in the cost of solid waste management.

The basic measures which we need to take are simple and can be implemented fairly quickly. First of all, particular attention needs to be focused on educating and informing the general public about the options available to them for reducing the volume of refuse they generate, sorting it efficiently, as well as increasing the rate of recycling it. These basic measures also include introducing pricing mechanisms to get consumers to behave responsibly. More support needs to be given to poor countries where national and local authorities will face a growing urban population, which, in turn, will generate a larger volume of solid waste.

President. – That concludes this item.

22. Development cooperation with Latin America (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the debate on the report by Ricardo Cortés Lastra, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on defining a new development cooperation with Latin America (2011/2286(INI)) (A7-0159/2012).

Ricardo Cortés Lastra, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, in the context of the current negotiation process for the next development cooperation instrument (DCI) for 2014-2020, the report I am presenting today wishes to send a clear message to the Council and the Commission: Latin America cannot, and must not, be cast aside.

The Commission's message is clear: many Latin American countries have achieved their growth targets, and must therefore be considered as graduates of development aid. However, while the region has experienced an unquestionable phase of growth, we are talking about one of the regions with the greatest inequality in the world, a region that is home to 41% of the poorest people on the planet, a region where 52 million people live on less than USD 2 a day and where some countries have malnutrition rates above 20%.

These figures reflect the other reality of Latin America, and that is where the EU continues to have a vital role to play in the region. In this context of an economically strong Latin America that is capable of fighting for its own development, the EU only has to continue supporting the region where we are needed.

We do not support the radical approach proposed by the Commission, which bases differentiation solely on economic criteria, which means that countries such as Ecuador, Colombia and Peru come out of our 'envelope' of bilateral aid, and that, surprisingly, it maintains cooperation with a country such as South Africa, with similar or even better economic and social data than Ecuador or Peru.

Yes, Commissioner, we are concerned by the discriminatory treatment of Latin America in your proposal. We therefore ask for responsible differentiation that takes into account other indicators, such as the poverty, vulnerability and European Commission Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) crisis index, and the Gini coefficient. It is also essential that the next development cooperation instrument fulfils its objective of eradicating poverty, and we therefore ask that it add value to the EU's development cooperation policy by implementing cooperation to suit each country and region, with the aim of maximising our financial efforts and the effectiveness of our aid, thus avoiding sending a harsh political message to our partners in Latin America.

We support a change of focus for our cooperation that consolidates the economic and social achievements of Latin America; a new focus that implies responsibility that must be shared and supported by the countries of the region, encouraging more efficient fiscal

and taxation policies and promoting basic social services, investment in science, technology and innovation, and combating insecurity among the population.

Effective cooperation also means directing our resources towards the most vulnerable. The report therefore asks for the volume of the development cooperation instrument for Latin America to be maintained and for any possible reallocation of funds to benefit the less developed countries in the same region. The current Commission proposal removes 11 Latin American countries from bilateral cooperation. We do not support this radical approach and ask for the redirection of the development cooperation instrument.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Santiago Fisas Ayxela (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, I would first of all like to congratulate Mr Cortés Lastra on his excellent report. Latin America is one of the regions of the world that has grown the most in recent years. As its largest global donor, the European Union has made a significant contribution to that development, and this is not the time to suddenly cut off our aid, but rather to do so gradually, so that those countries can consolidate their rule of law and continue to reduce their poverty figures.

We need to maintain the levels of cooperation aid to Latin America as, despite achieving regional growth figures of more than 4%, it has the largest pockets of poverty in the world and the greatest levels of economic and social inequality. The European Union and Latin America share common values and interests and must move forward together in order to face up to the global challenges facing our societies, which are now more interdependent than ever.

Ana Miranda (Verts/ALE). – (PT) Mr President, I would first like to congratulate Mr Cortés Lastra for this inclusive focus on the economic, social and territorial growth of Latin America. Under no circumstances will we settle, nor vote, for a proposal so minimal that it will be detrimental to the rights acquired and to the cooperation assistance given so far, because we look at Latin America differently at a time when it has shown extraordinary signs of social growth and progress, even if these are not enough to counter the poverty and social exclusion that exists. We also agree that the indigenous peoples throughout Latin America should be recognised and given support to increase their participation.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, some of the most interesting and exciting social transformation processes in the world are currently taking place in Latin America. Breaking with the neoliberalism that has ruled the region for decades, along with the IMF's structural adjustment programmes and the dramatic impact these have had, has allowed different countries to move forward with progress and social justice. Their economic growth rates are reasonable, even given the global crisis, social inequality is falling and social rights are advancing, unlike here, where the opposite is happening. Inevitably there are failings and delays in some areas, which cannot be ignored. This situation places new demands and challenges on development cooperation. As various countries have been suggesting, it is time to redirect the European Union's cooperation policies, moving from an existentialist vision involving paternalism and, on occasion, interference and the imposition of political and economic models, towards greater support and cooperation in areas such as training, science and technology, while respecting the legitimate choices and sovereignty of the peoples.

Kinga Gál (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in connection with the report just presented, I would like to say a few words about the role and importance

of human rights in the bilateral relations of the EU. It is of exceptional importance to ensure that respect for, and protection of, human rights is a crucial element and an inevitable condition in all forms of cooperation agreements. This especially holds true if a country is violating the human rights of EU citizens. I am thinking here specifically about the example of Bolivia and the case of Előd Tóásó, who has been on remand in Bolivia since 16 April 2009, whereas, even according to current Bolivian laws, this provisional status can no longer be maintained, having expired on 16 April. Tóásó has still not been released. His right to a fair trial is being violated. I would therefore like to ask the competent bodies of the EU to take human rights into account when signing these agreements.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, Latin America is a region with gradually increasing economic growth. Despite the rather optimistic economic forecasts, however, more than 180 million people there still live below the poverty line. The involvement of European policy in Latin America must therefore continue to take account of the specific conditions of economic development. We spoke this afternoon about how the new Commission proposal changing the structure and criteria for providing general tariff preferences may have a negative impact on this region, and we recommended that the Commission make appropriate modifications to the submitted proposal. I firmly believe that we can continue to have a positive influence on the further development of Latin America through an appropriate policy of sensitive partner communications combined with tariff relief or material assistance linked to support for the civilian conduct of society.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, the national economies of Latin America were hit less hard by the economic crisis than other parts of the globe. For 2012, an economic growth rate of 4.5% is even forecast. Despite all the growth forecasts, however, roughly 180 million people in the region live below the poverty line and, according to the United Nations, the biggest inequalities in the world are still to be found among the 15 states. Moreover, with 25 homicides per 100 000 residents, Latin America is one of the most violent regions in the world.

The EU is not only the largest donor of development aid, it is also the biggest investor and the second largest trading partner. In this position, what is necessary, in particular, is to cement the rule of law, but also to tackle the terrible problem of poverty. Key areas in this regard are health and education, but also the small and medium-sized enterprises sector. Support for these enables people to help themselves, and the EU can use its influence in this region on a positive and sustainable basis.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, this report comes at the most appropriate time in the process of identifying the future EU cooperation framework, as well as the key issues of our relations with Latin American countries. It will serve as an important contribution to the discussions on the proposed external financial instruments and will be an important pillar for the definition of the region's strategic priorities. In view of this, the Commission notes that the main recommendations of the report are closely in line with our current and, in particular, our future views for cooperating with the Latin American region.

As the rapporteur affirms, Latin America is a region of heterogeneous countries of wide diversity. This is also true from a needs perspective. The past decade has seen unprecedented growth levels in the region. Many of the middle-income countries now have the necessary means and solid bases from which they can build their national development plans. Indeed,

we have been approached, on a number of occasions, by various developing countries which expressed the desire to move away from pure poverty alleviation programmes towards a wider development cooperation agenda.

This is exactly what we describe in the Agenda for Change Communication and also with the proposed external financial instruments. We need to concentrate the scarce resources available where they are needed most and where they will have the greatest impact. This does imply that the more advanced developing countries would graduate out of bilateral assistance and cooperation.

However, this also means that we would engage in a different kind of development relationship with these countries, based on the facilitation of investment projects, for example, through blending mechanisms and regional programmes, as well as taking advantage of their experience through trilateral or South-South cooperation.

To further underpin the relations with the more advanced countries, we also count on the newly proposed partnership instrument, through which we hope to bring our relations to yet higher and more sophisticated levels.

Regardless of the differentiation applied in the development cooperation instrument, it is the Commission's intention to commit a significant level of funding to the Latin American region under this instrument which, combined with the availability of different external cooperation instruments and programmes, will enable us to define the most appropriate strategy for each individual country in the region in line with the EU's continued commitment to policy coherence for development, which is also mentioned in the report.

As for the process of defining these strategies, the principal priority areas identified by the report are very much in line with those identified in Annex IV(B) of the Commission proposal on the development cooperation instrument.

To conclude, the EU will continue to be actively and significantly engaged in the Latin American region. However, our relations with the region are maturing. They have changed from that of donor beneficiary solidarity to one of equal partners. The proposed external financial instruments should give us sufficient flexibility and scope and, at the same time, the necessary concentration and focus to develop effective cooperation strategies with each individual Latin American country.

In so doing, the EEAS and the Commission count on a contribution from the European Parliament. We are happy to note that the report presented recognises many of the same challenges and priority areas as those identified by us during the preparation of the legislative proposal on the development cooperation instrument.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 12 June, at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Vladko Todorov Panayotov (ALDE), in writing. – The EU has privileged relations with Latin American countries. Indeed, not only is the EU the first investor and the first provider of public development aid in the region, the historical and cultural links between the two continents also appear to be extremely solid and reaffirmed from both sides. Moreover, thanks to a sustainable growth, the continent is only moderately affected by the financial, economic and social crisis and has achieved significant progress in terms of democracy.

These achievements are narrowing the gaps between the two continents. Our continents are thusly bounded and also very complementary. Prospects are that Latin America will become more and more a strategic partner for the EU. That is why we need to pursue cooperation and development policies with a highlight on industry aspects, insisting on technology exchange, on the one hand, and raw materials trade agreements, on the other. This type of collaboration would solve a large part of both continent's structural problems. It is crucial that the EU does not cultivate the subordinate role of Latin America and manages to make this industrial partnership a priority in the framework of a more relevant type of cooperation.

Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) We should continue to be very interested in cooperation on development with Latin America. Although the countries of the region have been successful, in fighting poverty for example, and despite the fact that they reported average GDP growth in 2011, their situation is still far from satisfactory. The main objectives of continued cooperation should be support for the countries of Latin America in combating the problem of poverty and promoting sustainable social and economic development. Although the national economies of these countries have been affected by the crisis to a lesser extent than countries in other parts of the world, there are still 180 million people in Latin America living below the poverty line. On top of this, there are questions of social inequality and improper administration, and this threatens the process of development in these countries. Our support is important because Latin America's middle-income countries are a driving force for regional integration and this leads, in turn, to a better economic and social situation for low income countries in the same region. The EU and Latin America base their partnership on respect for shared values and fundamental liberties, as a result of which the duty to respect human rights has become very important for the countries of the region, and the EU's withdrawal from the partnership may lead to greater numbers of violations in this area. When establishing the new cooperation strategy, we should take account of the relevant needs and priorities of each of the countries involved.

23. Cross-border voluntary activities in the EU (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report by Marco Scurria, on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU (2011/2293(INI)) (A7-0166/2012).

Marco Scurria, *rapporteur.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the adoption of this resolution is very important because, until just a few months ago, volunteering was an object of mystery for the European Union. Even though it involved 100 million volunteers responsible for 5% of GDP, the sector did not actually appear to exist.

Then, despite a series of difficulties, we managed to dedicate last year, 2011, to volunteering and we all began to pick up on its excellent potential. Member States that did not have legislation on this issue have adopted legislation, others have updated theirs, many have increased the activities carried out by voluntary associations and, especially at a time of crisis like the one we are experiencing, have assigned an important role – a subsidiary role, as it is referred to – to the non-profit world.

We started off from this point to accentuate the role of volunteering in the European Union, as shown by the report we are debating this evening. We started off with an excellent

communication from the Commission, whom I thank for their work, as I thank the shadow rapporteurs and officials of the groups and Parliament who helped me draw up the report.

What have we set out? First, a portal to tell citizens about the volunteering opportunities in various Member States and how to get involved. Next, use of the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work and the United Nations Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions with a view to making available comparable statistics and data providing a clear picture of the significant contribution made by volunteering and of the needs of volunteers throughout the European Union.

We want to give volunteering a high profile in sport, particularly at the grassroots level. We would like to recognise the important contribution also made by volunteering to protecting the environment, and to support volunteering activities in environmental education, crisis prevention and management, as well as in defending artistic and cultural heritage.

We support the Commission's proposal to establish a European Skills Passport, so that the skills acquired through volunteering may be officially recognised, both for professional and for learning purposes. A passport that should be a comprehensive document listing all practical experience, training and soft and vocational skills acquired through lifelong learning, including those gained through volunteering, if desired by the volunteer. We urge the Commission to put this European Skills Passport in place as soon as possible.

We also support the Commission's proposal to create a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, which will increase the participation of volunteers in solidarity actions in the context of the humanitarian aid policy throughout the EU.

We wish to ensure adequate and stable funding and establish and simplify administrative procedures, including tax incentives, for the organisations involved in volunteering work, including associations and networks, particularly for small associations with limited resources, with a view to enhancing their roles, activities and achievements as they provide such benefits to society.

As Henry de Montherlant used to say, 'Selfless acts are the stars of the earth'. Volunteering work has this capability. With its activity, provided free of charge, it can bring the stars onto our earth and plant them firmly into the soil. Our flag, Mr President, is made up of stars, which is why the EU must not fail to strengthen the voluntary sector and its world made up of great little everyday gestures.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Kinga Gál (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, I congratulate the rapporteur on his excellent work, which contributes to reinforcing the role of volunteering in the EU. In this context, I would like to mention a specific initiative that was launched 19 years ago with a view to promoting cross-border voluntary cooperation. This programme, entitled Students Without Boundaries, won the first European Charlemagne Youth Prize in 2008. The programme essentially entails youths of the various peoples that coexist in Central and Eastern Europe connecting without boundaries, travelling together, and strengthening tolerance and mutual acceptance. The leaders and organisers of the programme are all volunteers. I think that exemplary programmes should be highlighted and recognised at European level; one way of expressing such recognition could be, for example, the European Charlemagne Youth Prize. These should be supported by all means available.

Katarína Neveďalová (S&D). – (SK) Mr President, I would first like to thank Mr Scurria for the excellent cooperation in the preparation of this report, and I am delighted that, following the European Year of Volunteering in 2011, we have produced an assessment of what the voluntary sector in the EU really looks like, and we can see where the shortcomings are and where there is room for improvement. We must always, of course, bear in mind the rights of volunteers and their genuine non-discrimination, so that everyone has the same opportunities and the same chances. In relation to volunteering, it is very important to discuss quality, the recognition of voluntary operations and voluntary activities, and also the protection of volunteers as such. We know that many EU countries do not, for example, have a law on volunteering, even though the situation is constantly improving. This is one of the proposals, for example, which we have pushed for in this report. I would be delighted if we could really push through support for volunteering in all age categories in the new EU programmes for 2014-2020, and if we could remember that this activity is highly beneficial to society and that everyone engaged in it is really performing a very worthwhile activity.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, first of all, let me congratulate the rapporteur on this very comprehensive report, and also the Commission on its communication. I know it is constrained to some extent in its competences, but think it has made the most of it. Also, it was very proactive during the European Year of Volunteering, so well done to the Commission on that.

There are a number of points that I would like to raise. First of all, there is an issue about economic and financial consolidation in different Member States. There is a temptation to cut back on the support that is available to voluntary organisations. I think this needs to be resisted because, while volunteer time is unpaid, it is certainly not cost-free, and I think in that context, the rapporteur has made two very good suggestions in his report.

One of them is that volunteer time could be taken as match funding and this would help voluntary organisations, especially in European programmes. Also, in paragraph 46, he calls on the Commission to look at some sort of a mechanism to exempt voluntary organisations from VAT.

Malika Benarab-Attou (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the European Year of Volunteering 2011 served to put volunteering under the spotlight and to give the voluntary sector an opportunity to put forward valuable recommendations. I congratulate both the rapporteur and the Commission for their contributions on this issue.

Mr Scurria's report highlights the importance of ensuring that all citizens have access to volunteering activities and have the right to make their own contribution in order to support altruism and solidarity in their local area. Volunteering and community work as a whole represent an antidote to the changes in the labour market and to the risk of excluding parts of the population from enjoying basic goods and services.

For our group, volunteering must not be a new way of getting people into insecure employment. It is about clearly differentiating between the value of volunteering, provided free of charge, and profit-making activities. Furthermore, we encourage Member States to recognise the rights of volunteers and to use the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers as a point of reference.

Heinz K. Becker (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the rapporteur, Mr Scurria, for this report, as he affords volunteering the importance it is due and also really does get the most out of the Commission report. The promotion of volunteering through tax breaks and administrative simplifications is one of the key demands to be met by the Member States of the European Union.

A large number of senior citizens and young people, in particular, are active in volunteering and, as a result, integration into the European Qualifications Framework is particularly important for young people. Let us not forget, however, how large the radius of social activities in volunteering is. With that in mind, I see volunteering as a glue that holds society together.

Emer Costello (S&D). – Mr President, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur on this excellent report. As has been said, volunteering and volunteers account for 100 million people, or five percent of voluntary activities throughout the EU.

Voluntary activities at present are very important to major events, such as the current Euro 2012 football championships, the International Eucharistic Congress and the Special Olympics, which was very much founded on the basis of volunteers. Communities also benefit very much from volunteering, which helps to promote a sense of community through the voluntary organisations that serve them.

This report deals specifically with cross-border voluntary activities and emphasises how cross-border activities can promote and enrich young people and volunteers who are involved in these activities through intercultural experience. I very much welcome the proposal for a humanitarian core and I would suggest that there are a lot of people – particularly in Ireland – who have taken early retirement and who have quite a lot of skills which they are able to give. I would encourage people, perhaps those who have taken early retirement, to use their skills and to get involved in this.

I also welcome the skills passport, the removal of a lot of red tape, and the acknowledgement of the importance of volunteering activities for the skills and development of people.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, the importance of volunteering cannot be overestimated, both for the operation of modern states and for the function of civil society. The fact that the document we have before us stresses the importance of volunteering for the function of both societies and states is very important to me personally, as well as to my political group. While we appreciate the effort Mr Scurria has put into his work on this document, and while we appreciate the merits of volunteering, my political group will have to abstain from voting, mainly because some parts of the report threaten to increase the costs involved in running these programmes and promoting the idea we are talking about here. This was also mentioned by Ms Harkin in her speech. The report also contains several other things, and this is why – while we appreciate the merits of volunteering – we are going to abstain in this vote, although we do believe that the idea itself is very important.

Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the Scurria report discusses the extremely important question of volunteering. The nature of this work means that it is often treated as work which is of less value, and questions related to establishing the rights of volunteers remain unresolved. I think that in view of the economic crisis, volunteering – which provides support for democracy and is an expression of solidarity –

should be the subject of particular care and should also be encouraged in countries which are not part of the Union. I think we should begin by clarifying the legal framework, and that we should also eliminate unnecessary administrative barriers. Bureaucratic obstacles often mean that volunteers cannot do their work, and many of them end up feeling discouraged. I think the European football championship currently being held in Poland and Ukraine furnishes excellent evidence of how much we need volunteers and how very useful they are to us.

Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Mr President, excuse me. In principle, the tradition is to have one speaker per group before hearing more speeches from other groups.

I would like to make a small protest, a point of order, to ask both the interpreters and translators to stop their constant use of an Anglicism whereby they confuse the terms '*bénévolat*' (voluntary work) and '*volontariat*' (voluntary service). The French translation for the word 'volunteer' is '*bénévole*'.

I would like to thank Mr Scurria for the quality of his work and the way in which he has cooperated with all of the shadow rapporteurs. It has been a real pleasure working on this report and I would like to emphasise three points in particular.

It is not truly possible to have volunteers if there are no voluntary organisations. To that end, it is important, Commissioner, that the Commission moves towards the recognition of a European Statute for Associations. It has made some efforts for the other bodies of the social economy but we are met with silence concerning the European Statute for Associations; this cannot go on.

I also wanted to say that it is absolutely fundamental to recognise the concept of grants to associations, particularly during the present time of budgetary constraints, so that we may make advances and cease to confuse subsidies with State aid.

President. – Ms Vergiat, I feel I must inform you that, as chair today, I have to follow the rule that the strength of speakers' groupings has to be taken into account when giving them the floor. These are the rules. I will, in any case, be giving many more speakers the floor. I am trying, however, to organise the speeches according to the strength of the groups, as prescribed for me in the Rules of Procedure.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, 100 million European citizens volunteer and generate, after all, almost 5% of Europe's GDP. However, many volunteers frequently face difficult physical and psychological burdens during their volunteering and appropriate social security must also be borne in mind.

Anyone looking to operate across borders, as most recently with the earthquake in Liguria, should not have to overcome unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles. Skills acquired must be recognised across the Union, and these also need to be documented. A European Skills Passport would be a sensible idea here. However, collaboration in this regard should be based, first and foremost, on the exchange of best practice. Austria and Germany, for instance, are exemplary when it comes to volunteer fire services. Such structures could also be exported to other parts of Europe and could play a central role in future disaster management.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, I should like to congratulate our rapporteur, Mr Scurria, on an exceptional report and a job very well done during the European Year of Voluntary Activities and now in this report. Congratulations.

I should like to add to what has already been said, by saying that, despite the measures that we have proposed and despite the efforts made to date, there are still huge discrepancies between national levels of voluntary activities. In Austria and the Netherlands, we have approximately 30% voluntary participation, compared with the countries of southern Europe, where the rate is less than 15%. The same applies, of course, to the contribution of voluntary activities to each country's GDP. In countries with high levels of voluntary activities, the contribution may be as high as 5%, compared with 0.3% in countries where there are low levels of voluntary activities. Thus, to those who say that, quite apart from the joy of participation and creativity offered by voluntary activities, we need to reduce voluntary activities because of the crisis, we say that, on the contrary, voluntary activities can also make an essential contribution to this sector too.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) Mr President, volunteering is at the heart of a functioning European society. For some areas, such as social and health services, fire-fighting activities, leisure activities for the young and so on, the network of volunteers forms an indispensable part of the system. One in five EU citizens gets involved in beneficial activities on a voluntary basis and our task is to facilitate the possibility of cross-border volunteering. This will help, among other things, to break down remaining historical barriers. I share the rapporteur's view that we should create a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps and that we must find a way of facilitating the mobility of volunteers. The European Skills Passport is a good step in this direction. For selected sectors, there is also the solution of modifying administrative permits for third-country nationals in order to facilitate volunteering. The sharing of know-how will certainly help. Legal measures to prevent the misuse of this arrangement for illegal migration will also be of key importance. I therefore do not support lifting the visa requirement for such cases in the current phase.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, I endorse this initiative as, at the moment, young people have limited opportunities for accessing the labour market. The new measures being proposed offer them, in fact, the chance to develop more easily the personal and professional skills they need to become integrated more quickly into an intercultural environment.

On the other hand, however, I regret that no definite, outright differentiation is made between volunteering and profit-making, paid activities, leaving it open to interpretation by those organisations which could abuse this aspect, especially as the proposal is also aimed at elderly people wishing to participate in community life, and who are already of an age and have extensive professional experience which could be used. I think that we should continue to focus our attention on introducing detailed procedures to make this distinction clear, thereby preventing any such risks of exploiting the work of those who would like to get involved in volunteering.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, I would like to thank Parliament and, in particular, the rapporteur, Mr Scurria.

The European Commission is very satisfied with the results of the European Year of Volunteering, which gave a lot of momentum to volunteering in Europe and showed that volunteering contributes to our democratic and pluralistic society and lends added value to EU policies. A large and varied number of activities took place during the European Year of Volunteering – many of which will continue beyond that European Year – and a significant number of structures put in place in 2011 have become permanent.

So far, six important policy documents have been adopted as a result of the European Year. Mr Scurria's report on 'Recognising and promoting cross-border voluntary activities in the EU' will be the seventh significant policy document in this series in support of volunteering.

The report links in perfectly with the Commission communication on EU policies on volunteering. Our communication aimed to outline the ways in which the Commission already supports the voluntary sector and how it plans to further improve the recognition and promotion of volunteering in the future.

We agree on many points. Both Parliament and the European Commission recommend that Member States should assess the need for creating a clear legal framework for volunteering and develop appropriate national strategies to achieve that. Together, we are encouraging Member States to make volunteering accessible to all sectors of society and to support cooperation between providers of voluntary activities in the EU.

Another common recommendation to Member States is that they should adopt the volunteering measurement methods developed by Johns Hopkins University to get a clearer picture of the role of voluntary activities in our economy. The European Commission is committed to ensuring long-term follow-up of the European Year and has taken concrete steps in this direction.

Overall, the European Year of Volunteering 2011 influenced positively volunteering in Europe. This positive influence will continue, since it may take several more years for some of the benefits of the Year to bear fruit and become tangible. The European Year of Volunteering lies behind us, but we are now at a starting point for ensuring that the legacy of that European Year remains in place. The Commission communication of last September and your report today show us ways to follow up on that Year, including by developing synergies with the proposed European Year of Citizens in 2013.

The Commission looks forward to working with Parliament towards our common objective to further facilitate and promote volunteering in the European Union.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 12 June, at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) Volunteering contributes directly to the key objectives of EU policies, including social inclusion, employment, education, capacity building, citizenship, justice and social solidarity. For this to be recognised, it is necessary to encourage the Commission to continue to support volunteering through its programmes and cohesion programmes, as well as recognise that the informal learning achieved through volunteering should be valued at national and European level. As such, it is necessary to create national strategies and a clear legal framework at European Union level.

I recall that we celebrated the European Year of Volunteering in 2011, an initiative that gave us a deeper understanding of the added value from these activities. Volunteering has spread such that today, Europe counts on more than 100 million volunteers, who have a decisive impact on social cohesion and the economy. The body of actions of social and community interest carried out through volunteers' own initiative or within projects or programmes must therefore be properly formulated and valued, *inter alia*, within the scope of the cross-border mobility encouraged by the EU.

Sergio Berlato (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The year 2011 was the European Year of Volunteering, full of initiatives that saw volunteers across Europe engage in promotion, information and awareness-raising activities on this issue. Recent figures show that there is a body of 100 million European citizens working in various voluntary activities, who are able to contribute 5% of European GDP. In my view, volunteering is an expression of active citizenship in all spheres of social life, while cross-border volunteering, in particular, is an opportunity for intercultural enrichment for young European citizens. Following the visibility acquired through the European Year of Volunteering, I feel it is appropriate to focus on various specific measures to promote these activities. To this end, I welcome the rapporteur's proposals, including the idea of establishing a centralised EU portal on volunteering with a specific section dedicated to cross-border volunteering, and of creating a 'European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps'. The latter, with the task of selecting, training and sending volunteers to provide support to local organisations in the event of natural disasters, has the invaluable advantage of developing synergies with existing organisations and structures in order to avoid duplication and funding diversion.

Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) Cross-border cooperation is extremely important in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Volunteering contributes to the implementation of the Europe 2020 growth strategy and, in particular, to the attainment of the EU's 2020 employment rate target. Cross-border volunteering helps people acquire new skills and adapt to changes in the labour market. EU funds are often an important instrument here, as they can be used with programmes which promote new technologies and innovations or with programmes related to culture or education. I personally think we should also give attention to the countries of the Eastern Partnership when promoting voluntary activities – one way to popularise volunteering among young people is to open Erasmus to students from Eastern Europe. Every year, Erasmus enables around 200 000 students from 33 countries to make an exchange visit. Students from Eastern Partnership countries currently have limited opportunities to participate in student exchanges and, in fact, it is mainly students who are volunteers.

Tiziano Motti (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Volunteering makes it possible to carry out work useful to society and to acquire skills and knowledge which will help with job-seeking or with getting onto a particular training course. The creation of a 'skills passport' needs to be supported, in order to facilitate the formal recognition of professional experience across the EU, which must go hand in hand with an increase in funding for European volunteering work. Volunteering is, in fact, experienced and regulated in too many different ways in the Member States and recognition of the volunteering work performed, even where this is provided entirely free of charge, is not uniform among the countries. We therefore hope that a centralised European portal will be created to help voluntary organisations to disseminate information, improve cooperation and exchange best practices and experiences, recognising a voluntary worker's 'passport', which can accredit any volunteering experiences even for university or professional use, keeping our young people active while they are seeking jobs, and disseminating best practices between voluntary organisations in Europe.

Csanád Szegedi (NI), *in writing.* – (HU) My party is of the opinion that it is extremely important to promote cross-border voluntary activities by all means possible. It is evident that there is a will in society to help our fellow human beings on a voluntary basis. An excellent example of this was the Hungarian Guard in Hungary, which participated in food distribution, blood donation and flood control on several occasions. As a Member of the

Jobbik party, I motion, by reference to the Hungarian example, that the European Parliament assert the principle of volunteering in its resolution.

24. Critical information infrastructure protection: towards global cybersecurity (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report by Ivailo Kalfin, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on critical information infrastructure protection – achievements and next steps: towards global cybersecurity (2011/2284(INI)) (A7-0167/2012).

Ivailo Kalfin, rapporteur. – Mr President, the European Union relies very heavily on the development of the new technologies economy, which is based on the Internet. But we have to be absolutely clear that neither the digital agenda goals nor new developments like cloud computing can be developed without having a trustworthy and resilient Internet environment. Therefore, the issues relating to Internet security and cybersecurity are of the utmost importance if we want to develop the whole infrastructure.

I would like to congratulate the Commission and Commissioner Kroes personally for the fact that in the last few months, there has been very intensive work in preparing the cybersecurity or Internet security strategy and in creating a European critical emergency response team and a European information sharing and alert system, to be active by 2013.

The European Commission has already proposed a Cybercrime Centre within Europol, which has now been created and which is an important element, but has not done everything that needs to be done. So there are developments, but what is very much missing is a framework at European level.

We have excellent examples of cybersecurity activities and very good results at national level, but things are very uneven. In the various Member States, we have very different practices, and what is very much lacking is European-level action. In terms of the Internet, we can be absolutely sure that no robust and resilient system at national level can be enough without devising and developing European capabilities.

In the report – and I would like to very much thank my colleagues and the shadow rapporteurs and everybody who was involved in this report – we give several recommendations for the further work of the European Commission.

First, and most important, is to include information and communication technologies in the critical infrastructures, together with all the mechanisms that are related to that; the Commission has to propose the inclusion of ICT as a critical infrastructure.

Second, we are calling for the creation of common minimum standards and minimum protocols for the reaction and resilience of the Internet system.

Third, something which is very important is cooperation with the private sector and public-private partnerships, but this also has to go in the direction of data breach notification. Whoever is attacked has to be informed; the public has the right to know what is happening in that respect.

Of course, we are calling for the elaboration of contingency plans at national level, contact points at national and also at European level, and the development of awareness and education activities, which are very important for cybersecurity.

Something which is very important is international cooperation, and I would like to finish with that. There are many things that could be done at European level in terms of international cooperation on cybersecurity and I really hope that they are going to be done by the European Commission and by the High Representative. These include: contacts with like-minded countries; having an active Europe-wide position on cybersecurity; raising issues at international fora including the G8, G20, OECD, etc.; including cybersecurity issues when we discuss development aid and our cooperation with developing countries, and including these issues where appropriate in signing trade agreements.

All these are files for the European Commission's in-tray, so that Europe has a very active international position relating to its cybersecurity. We have already started very good cooperation with the United States. This has to be continued with other countries, and Europe has to have a single voice on cybersecurity.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, thank you for this report, at an opportune moment, it seems to me, and thank you for your cooperation on this matter. We are talking, here, about really large amounts of losses if you look at what is going on in this world: USD 388 billion, according to what I heard recently in Commission questions. In the Netherlands alone, losses through fraud in Internet banking amounted to EUR 93 million in 2011. Globally, the losses are greater than in the trade in soft and hard drugs. To sum up, it is important to put this problem high on the agenda and work on it together.

There is just one thing I would like to highlight in my one minute of talking time. It concerns the European Cybercrime Centre in the Hague, to be brought under the umbrella of Europol. The centre will work to counter organised crime and credit card data fraud, for collaboration on identity theft, including with the social networks, to counteract the production of child pornography and to protect against attacks on critical infrastructure. These are things to which the citizens pay attention.

Rui Tavares (Verts/ALE). – (PT) Mr President, the strengthening of cyber attacks and other types of cybercrimes is certainly a very important issue. Information systems containing sensitive data must be protected from those who want to spread terror and cause destruction, but must also be protected from careless governments, which have been increasingly developing certain types of cyber attacks, sometimes for opportunistic reasons and which, by sowing the wind now, could reap the whirlwind in the future. This is an issue where great care is required and the precautionary principle applies.

We must never forget that protecting individual privacy is equally important. We must never sacrifice the privacy of our citizens as we develop plans to strengthen Internet security and we cannot allow our fundamental rights to be sacrificed or forgotten. That is, we must not transfer to the European Union, to the Commission, powers that could be disproportionate at this time. Some recent experiences, such as Passenger Name Records (PNR), invite us to be cautious in this area. Not only cybercriminals can cause serious problems; institutions and governments, if they are not careful, can sometimes cause problems that are even worse.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) Mr President, computer technologies form the backbone of our society, while, at the same time, making society vulnerable in new areas. Cybersecurity now requires coordinated action and a global approach. I believe we must strengthen the

powers of Europol and also incorporate defence against cyber attacks into EU and national domestic and external security strategies. Just like other Members, I have concerns over the functioning of ENISA. Europe has the highest standards in the world for personal data protection, and this year we will further modernise them, which should reduce the possibility of Internet identity theft, but cooperation between security forces and other bodies responsible for general information security remains a weak point. On the other hand, Estonia is good example. It experienced a massive cyber attack in the past and has developed a very solid institutional framework. Unfortunately, there is much room for improvement in the European financial sector. I am pleased the Commission is aware of this and will invest considerable funds on this issue within the framework of the digital agenda.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, we recognise the importance of ensuring that our populations have the security and protection they need when using the Internet, as well as the infrastructure that provides the service. However, we profoundly disagree that this proposition should be included in a set of security strategies and policies, which are deeply harmful to the same populations in terms of labour and freedom of expression. There is a notably strong connection between these measures and the activities of the European External Action Service, which intends to use them to ‘include Internet security issues in the scope of its external relations, *inter alia*, when designing various financing instruments’, aligning political objectives and legislative action with our US counterparts. They orchestrate coordinated positions in international forums involving NATO, the UN, the World Bank and others. Cybersecurity cannot be used to legitimise interventions and interference, which have nothing to do with citizens’ liberty.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, measures need to be devised enabling cybersecurity systems to be developed, the risks of disruption to the Internet, which is a critical infrastructure, to be reduced, as well as the level of IT security to be increased globally in as many areas of activity as possible. This can only be achieved through international cooperation. Therefore, I think that legislation needs to be harmonised across all EU Member States concerning coercive measures and criminal actions against critical infrastructures. This can only be achieved by defining, across the whole European Union, standard measures for imposing tough sanctions on those initiating cyber attacks and disruption, which would curtail the risk of them occurring.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Neelie Kroes, *Vice-President of the Commission.* – Mr President, I really appreciate this opportunity for reflection on a very important issue.

Let me just start by mentioning that the Commission congratulates Mr Kalfin on his important and – by the way – timely report. That needs to be underlined, for it is timely and it also opens the floor for a debate. I appreciate highly all that has been said here by Members of this Parliament for this is not only an issue that is heavy with facts and figures, but it is also a kind of trust and security for people who use the Internet. As we say that every European should be connected and should be digital, then it is our responsibility – of Parliament, the Council and the Commission – to provide trust and security, so to speak.

As rightly acknowledged in this report, every day, the Internet and the digital ecosystem boost productivity, drive innovation, and stimulate growth and high-quality jobs. At the same time, threats are growing and so is the vulnerability of our networks.

Since 2001, the Commission has adopted a number of policy initiatives on network and information security to boost cooperation at EU level, with the involvement of Member States and relevant stakeholders and with the support of ENISA. This includes the action plan on critical information infrastructure protection (CIIP), adopted by the Commission in 2009 and revised in 2011.

As you may know, the Commission is aware that capabilities and preparedness across the EU vary considerably. I have been constantly monitoring the state of progress in the Member States on the adoption of national cybersecurity strategies and cyber incident contingency plans, the organisation of national cyber exercises and the establishment of well-functioning national/governmental CERTs, which, as you are aware, stands for 'Computer Emergency Response Teams'. All those points are addressed in the report and, once again, great work has been done.

This stocktaking exercise has demonstrated that, despite the efforts undertaken so far, we need to do more. We need to act strategically and give attention to cybersecurity at the highest political level. Parliament and relevant stakeholders have long called for the Commission to adopt a strategic and comprehensive vision. Your support will be crucial in the adoption and implementation of such a vision.

In the coming months, I will present, together with High Representative Catherine Ashton and my colleague, Commissioner Cecilia Malmström, a comprehensive European strategy for cybersecurity. That cybersecurity strategy will provide for both policy and regulatory measures.

Reaching a high level of network and information security across the EU is vital to ensure the smooth functioning of the internal market. The measures that we will propose will aim at raising levels of security nationally as well as at EU level, by establishing appropriate mechanisms for cross-border cooperation as well as for public-private cooperation and information exchange. We need to make sure that there are no weak links across the EU.

From the policy side, the vision should hinge on the need to improve the overall resilience of network and information systems, stepping up the fight against cybercrime, and developing an external EU cybersecurity policy.

We will ensure continuity with our policies and make steps forward on key areas such as fighting botnets, cybersecurity of industrial control systems, smart grids and security standards, as well as on research and development, awareness raising and international cooperation.

The strategy will include actions to stimulate the competitiveness of the European ICT industry and stimulate user demand to provide security functionalities in ICT products and services. Horizon 2020 will support the goals of the strategy.

Overall, the strategy will help Europe put its own house in order. That will strongly contribute to better positioning the EU at international level also. I hope that you will agree that the strategy adequately responds to the recommendations provided in Parliament's CIIP report.

IN THE CHAIR: JACEK PROTASIEWICZ

Vice-President

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 12 June 2012, at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Ágnes Hankiss (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) As rapporteur for the draft opinion of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs attached to the report, I would like to congratulate Mr Kalfin on his professional approach and for drafting a balanced resolution. As you are aware, cybersecurity is an important pillar of EU internal security. In my earlier comments on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party on the Internal Security Strategy, I expressed on several occasions the view that it is vital to set up a common threat assessment system and to better coordinate the Member State practices necessary for the protection of critical information infrastructure. Guaranteeing EU cybersecurity necessitates cooperation between state and private sector participants, as well as civilian and military actors in the EU. The cybersecurity centre to be established will also serve this purpose. Moreover, one of our urgent tasks is to complete the identification of European critical infrastructures. In order to achieve the goals set out in the recently adopted Internal Security Strategy, it is unavoidable to allocate proportionate budgetary resources to them, and we must seek to ensure that the measures included in the Internal Security Strategy are appropriately represented in the budget for 2014-2020.

25. Energy policy cooperation with partners beyond our borders (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the short presentation of the report by Edit Herczog, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on engaging in energy policy cooperation with partners beyond our borders: a strategic approach to secure, sustainable and competitive energy supply (2012/2029(INI)) (A7-0168/2012).

Edit Herczog, *rapporteur.* – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, our task is to ensure long-term energy supply for EU citizens and enterprises in a rapidly changing world and a rapidly changing Europe. In this age of digital economy and society, uninterrupted energy supply has, if anything, become even more important. To ensure that the issue of energy does not lead to tensions or conflict between the world's countries is a global challenge. The European Union, too, is competing on a global scale with numerous rapidly developing economies. The EU's dependence on countries with rich fossil fuel supplies and transit countries is growing continuously. Besides the European Union's internal responses, namely, the linking of markets, increasing efficiency and the full utilisation of renewables, it would also be worth considering potential common policies beyond the borders of the EU.

We should consider the following: although currently, our energy connections mainly lie to the east and to the south, in the future, all regions of the world will enter the energy markets. We must therefore draw up policies focusing on five continents, three oceans, as well as the polar circles. Interconnected energy networks increase the EU's bargaining power, but only if we set up an institutional structure which does not allow Member States to be played against each other. We therefore propose that this issue be regularly discussed at Council meetings, with the Commissioner and the High Representative present. Furthermore, we propose the creation of a common database to facilitate the conclusion of the best possible agreements, and we therefore ask the Commission to draft the relevant legislation.

In the energy sector, investments and the speed at which they are implemented are particularly important, which is why it would be advisable to optimise decision making. We propose that the European Union's Commissioner for Energy be given a more extensive and clearer mandate to negotiate certain matters in common energy projects.

Resource dependency on the energy market is accompanied by technological dependency. The European Union is at the forefront in several fields in this respect. The same is true of legislation and standardisation. We must reach a point where neighbouring regions, and even the more distant ones, consider our legislative process and decision-making mechanisms as a model when drafting their own laws. This latter aspect is particularly important when it comes to adherence to environmental, safety and employment rules because what we are seeing is that European Union enterprises can sometimes face unfair competition from foreign actors if we are unable to ensure that the latter use similar moderation. It is therefore crucial to continue the drafting of rules through international organisations, and to make sure that their implementation is also appropriate. We strongly support the proposal put forward by the Commission and the Commissioner for Energy and we wished to expand on it with our own work.

I would like to thank the shadow rapporteurs for the active and effective debate and the numerous discussions we had, and we hope that this will ultimately result in greater influence for the European Union in the field of energy.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE). – (LT) Mr President, in today's world, energy has long been a global issue and not just due to the resources themselves or the need for them, but due to environmental issues. I have in mind the extraction, production and transfer of energy.

As we know, contamination is transboundary. When cooperating with third countries, it is therefore important to aim to ensure that they comply with relevant high environmental standards. One of the most important issues of the European Union's cooperation with foreign partners in the field of energy is the guarantee of a high level of nuclear security that satisfies European Union standards.

This must also apply in third countries when new power plants are constructed and existing ones are renovated or simply operated. This should be a prerequisite when importing energy to the European Union from nuclear power plants in third countries. The European Union must seek an open dialogue and producers of nuclear energy in third countries must answer all questions. Currently, we are facing the fact that there are some serious questions about the nuclear power plants due to be constructed near the European Union's borders.

I would like to offer my congratulations to the rapporteur, Edit Herczog.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, global economic development and the rapid economic growth in Asia and other parts of the world have generated huge demand for energy sources. It is clear that an increasing number of new industrial areas will be drawing on a limited volume of energy sources, and that our traditional energy partners will increasingly be able to choose whom to sell their energy fuels to. I therefore agree that a policy of stable and lasting energy security must be a major priority for the EU. From a geographical perspective, it seems sensible to me to focus more on closer relations in the area of energy with Mediterranean countries and traditional partners – Norway and Russia. The energy potential of the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus and Siberia will surely face

increasingly fierce demand from powerful new customers in Asia and other parts of the world. I therefore firmly believe that our new partnerships in Central Asia and the Caucasus should not be developed at the expense of Europe's existing energy suppliers.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, I will begin by congratulating Ms Herczog on her excellent work and on the constructive collaboration she established with the shadow rapporteurs, particularly with the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) (PPE). I fully endorse the priorities for the external energy policy given in the report. These are: strengthening the external dimension of the internal energy market; strengthening partnerships for a secure, sustainable and competitive energy supply; improving developing countries' access to sustainable energy; and promoting EU policies beyond its borders. I am also very pleased to see an increased balance between the different external borders, to the east, to the south, to the west and along the Atlantic and South Atlantic border.

Jacek Włosowicz (EFD). – (PL) Mr President, one of the European Union's most important problems is its reliance on energy imported from countries outside Europe. Unfortunately, despite the myths which have become popular recently, green energy is not the answer. The problem requires close cooperation and a multiannual financial framework similar to the one we see in place for the funds. The report we are discussing accurately defines and describes the EU's most important objectives and areas for action today with regard to building energy independence.

I would like to draw particular attention to two matters. Firstly, the development of energy cooperation within the European Union and, in particular, of energy diplomacy. The absence of energy diplomacy was noticeable when support was being mobilised for the Trans-Caspian pipeline. Secondly, it is also essential to ensure ongoing support for infrastructure projects which are of key significance for EU energy policy, including pipelines, interconnectors, underground storage and gas terminals. There are two projects on this list which I would like to highlight: the Nabucco pipeline and the Sarmatia pipeline, which, unfortunately, has been forgotten. I think that stable funding and political support for these two pipelines would provide the Union with cheap and secure energy.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) Mr President, I would like to congratulate Ms Herczog on an excellent report. Energy security is a key strategy area for Europe in the 21st century. The Member States must not be dependent on only one supplier, as there is a risk of third countries abusing such a position. We saw a practical demonstration of this during the Czech Presidency in 2009, when some countries became hostage to a dispute between Russia and Ukraine. The long-term response is to create a genuine internal market for energy. However, the market must bring stability. The fluctuating energy output from renewable sources, and particularly from wind turbines on the eastern borders in Germany, is currently causing considerable problems for the grid in the Czech Republic, and thus threatening stability of supply both there and for customers in Austria. I would therefore like to take the opportunity to call on the Commission and German MEPs to bring pressure to bear for the fastest possible completion of a strong transmission system in Germany. The constant threat of a blackout does not create favourable conditions for negotiating a more far-reaching single energy market. I am personally in favour of broadening the range of suppliers and of energy sources. However, we must negotiate with third countries in the immediate neighbourhood of the Union in order to prevent the construction of poor quality power plants that will interrupt the stability of our power system through output fluctuations.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Neelie Kroes, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Mr President, I am replacing my colleague, Günther Oettinger.

I can assure you that the secure and steady flow of energy at competitive prices is, for all of us, a fundamental necessity for the EU, but also a major challenge. We have made progress in strengthening our policies within the EU. At the same time, a stronger and more assertive external energy policy reflecting the full strength of the EU on the global scene is equally necessary to achieve our energy objectives.

A common regulatory framework in the EU has important consequences for our external partners. We need to ensure that internal market principles are respected and that EU energy security is promoted in a coherent way.

Despite the repeated calls for Europe to speak with a common voice, including from the European Parliament, we have not yet managed to reap the benefits of acting as one block. In external relations, national objectives too often prevail, without consideration for the common EU objectives. Yet past experiences clearly show that, together, Member States can achieve much greater results than on their own.

The proposals made by the Commission last September represent an important step in our efforts to develop a common voice and also respond to the request of the European Council of 4 February 2011.

The Commission welcomes the fact that the report recognises the importance of the external energy policy for the achievement of the EU energy objectives and stresses the need to promote regulatory convergence, diversification of supply and strengthened cooperation on sustainable energy policies. We also share the view expressed in the report that coherence and coordination on external energy activities needs to be improved at EU level, including on the energy agreements with third countries.

Without coordinated action, we will not be able to reap the benefits of a single European energy market of 500 million consumers and safeguard the security of supply for our citizens. Only a coherent position will allow Europe to influence the global agenda on energy in a way commensurate with its weight and role. Such coordination can be strengthened, particularly through setting up an information exchange on intergovernmental agreements in the field of energy. It will therefore be important to reach an agreement on this mechanism between the Council and Parliament.

While the Presidency compromise proposal on the mechanism is definitely below the ambition of the Commission's initial text – we would, of course, have liked to see a stronger approach – it is a first step in improving transparency on such agreements. The mandatory submission of existing IGAs having an impact on the internal market for energy, the confirmation that the Commission has the possibility to participate upon request in negotiations as an observer and to provide advice, as well as the possibility of performing, upon request, *ex ante* compatibility checks of negotiated agreements with EU legislation, are all likely to further compliance and consistency with internal market rules, legal certainty for investors and, not least, solidarity among Member States. As I said, this is a first set of steps, on which the Union must build in the future.

Another element I would like to emphasise is that the EU partnerships with suppliers, transit countries and consumers should reflect a strategic and comprehensive approach.

We should avoid supply-only or one-issue relationships with our partners. The EU's external relations in the energy field should go beyond efforts to ensure the steady flow of energy, but also address sustainable energy, research and innovation, stable and transparent energy markets, international standards for key technologies and products, and energy efficiency. This is important because of the role that energy plays in the overall political and economic relations with many of our partner countries, and because of the transformations we have seen in the energy field.

I thank Parliament for addressing this in the report. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the European Parliament, in particular, the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and its rapporteur, Edit Herczog, for its supportive contribution in this policy area. The report discussed today contains many important points, which the Commission will take into due consideration when further developing the external energy policy and implementing its concrete activities. With the great effort by Ms Herczog and the shadow rapporteurs, we have the opportunity to go a step forward. We look forward to Parliament's continued support in our effort to develop a true external EU energy policy and to the continued discussion on the specific external energy activities.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday.

Written statements (Rule 149)

António Fernando Correia de Campos (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) The EU's dependence on external energy supplies will continue to grow in the coming years, despite increasing input from renewable energy sources and the gains expected from energy efficiency. A piecemeal approach to external energy policy makes all Member States more vulnerable in a context of geopolitical uncertainty, weakening Europe. It is necessary to accelerate cooperation with third countries in developing new technologies. For example, there could be radical changes to the liquefied gas market with the enlargement of the Panama Canal and North American shale gas production, diversifying the EU's supply partners.

András Gyürk (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) A major portion of the European Union's crude oil and natural gas supply comes from countries outside Europe. Since the EU's dependence on external energy is likely to increase, I support the idea that the EU's set of rules on energy cooperation with third countries should be strengthened. In order for us to be able to effectively assert our interests, we must represent a single position in our negotiations with third countries. As long as EU Member States negotiate with major energy suppliers separately, our strategic partners will pursue a divisive energy diplomacy. In my opinion, there are three areas on which we should focus in the future when looking to improve the EU's ability to assert its interests: Firstly, the differences between national energy markets should be reduced. This can be achieved through the establishment of missing infrastructure and regulatory harmonisation. A single energy market is the key to approximating Member State interests appropriately and adopting a common position regarding energy. After the implementation of the single market, I would like to point out the necessity of continuous coordination. Indeed, by establishing effective coordination mechanisms we could ensure continuous consultations between Member States, thus facilitating the common assertion of interests at international negotiations. Thirdly, I would like to highlight diversification. In our international negotiations, we should seek to ensure that EU and Member State energy supplies are provided by multiple exporters of energy simultaneously. The diversification of suppliers and the conclusion of contracts with flexible terms and

conditions could help prevent total interruptions in energy supply in case of the loss of a major supplier.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), in writing. – (FI) The report on energy policy cooperation with partners beyond our borders is important because it contributes to the priorities set for future energy policies within our borders. I would also like to thank the rapporteur for drafting a balanced report that covers the issue of strengthening the EU energy market, the need to expand the links between the European energy network and that in neighbouring countries, and the creation of a wider regulatory area. It also covers concrete measures, however, such as those that could improve cooperation between us through the exploitation of different technologies and forms of energy. Sustainable energy and strengthened partnership among the various supplier countries are the particular areas that need to be focused on. The report rightly states that, with the increase in the number of unconventional energy technologies, actors and areas are emerging as new energy suppliers that are unfamiliar to us. It must be possible to take full advantage of this situation, in order to diversify our suppliers. It is nevertheless important that, whatever the energy solutions we opt for, we bear in mind our need for energy self-sufficiency, and that is why the emphasis in the EU's energy policy must be on the production and promotion of domestic forms of energy. At the same time, oil sands and shale gas, for example, are clearly the forms of energy that we will be using in the future, and we will need them until low emissions energy is commercially available and effective. These new forms of production split opinion among both the public and the decision makers, and it is for that reason that we must also ensure that these forms of energy are as ecologically sound as possible. In this context, regular energy dialogues with our partners are important in order for us to develop and better enforce safe, secure and efficient energy generation, transmission, transit, storage and processing. Furthermore, there needs to be greater cooperation on fusion research and nuclear safety so that globally, we reduce the risks associated with what continues to be a vitally important form of energy.

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I would like to express my sincere thanks to Ms Herczog for what is, in my opinion, a fully comprehensive treatment of the subject and for producing such a balanced report. I think the report's contents and the package of action to be taken by the European Commission will ensure the construction of a strong EU energy market by expanding the links between the European energy network and by creating a wider regulatory area which will encompass countries neighbouring the EU. The rapporteur also rightly stressed that the Commission should accelerate action to diversify suppliers, routes and sources of energy supply to the EU.

I am firmly convinced that there is a constant need to extend cooperation by building new interconnections linking European energy networks with the infrastructure of neighbouring countries and also by creating a wider regulatory area. Another factor which is certain to help preserve the stability of the energy system is the development of information sharing tools to enable closer partnerships with suppliers from outside the EU.

Zbigniew Ziobro (EFD), in writing. – (PL) The report under discussion leaves no room for doubt – the EU powers that be have done all they can for energy prices to rise. In defiance of public opinion, the policy makers allowed themselves to be taken in by the slogans of the green revolution and myths about an emission-free economy and cheap energy. They accepted the belief that a rapid 20% increase in the production of green energy and increased efforts to save energy would allow us to reduce bills and achieve energy independence. This was a mistake – a mistake which is having to be paid for today by the citizens of the

European Union. Data published by Eurostat show that over the last two years, household electricity prices have risen, on average, by 6.3%, and gas prices by 12.3%. In the same period, there has been a rise in our reliance on foreign suppliers, who provide over 53% of the fuel we need. In our geopolitical situation, this lack of diversification and the monopolistic position of Russia are particularly dangerous. Unfortunately, it is we who have created this situation. For over two years, we have been unable to decide to go ahead with the most important project in terms of our energy security – construction of the Nabucco pipeline. The most important decision of all, on funding for the project, is being delayed. The Commission and the Council are not showing the necessary commitment and have become nothing more than passive onlookers. I welcome the fact that the idea of better cooperation with the United States has been included in the report. Something which I think is particularly interesting is the possibility of cooperating on the extraction of shale gas, which I hope the Union will support as an alternative to the lack of diversification of fuel supplies.

26. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

27. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting closed at 22.00)