1. Opening of the sitting

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

2. Preparation of the European Council following the Irish referendum (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the preparation of the European Council following the Irish referendum.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) The second meeting of the European Council under the Slovenian Presidency will begin tomorrow. Allow me to set out the main subjects of discussion to be addressed by Heads of State and Government. The first debate will most certainly be devoted to examining the situation following the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty held last Thursday in Ireland. From the onset I would like to reiterate the words of President of the European Council Janez Janša: ‘The Presidency regrets the decision taken by Irish voters and is accordingly disappointed. It goes without saying that we will respect the will expressed by the Irish people.’

After the official outcome of the referendum had been made public, the President of the European Council spoke with a number of leaders of those Member States that have not yet completed the ratification procedure. It is encouraging to know that these Member States are determined to proceed with ratification. As underlined by the President of the European Council, the Lisbon Treaty is vital for the European Union and its citizens, as it brings more efficiency, democracy and transparency.

It is a fact that the problems and challenges confronting the Union today remain. Another fact is that the negative outcome of the Irish referendum will not help to solve these problems. At tomorrow’s meeting of the European Council, Heads of State and Government will deliberate how the situation could best be remedied. They will endeavour to set a timetable for further work. The Presidency is convinced that a solution could be found in cooperation with Ireland, and that the Union will not face the recurrence of the situation from 2005.

At the European Council we will listen primarily to the Taoiseach, Mr Brian Cowen, as he explains the circumstances surrounding the referendum result, and the reasons for such an outcome.

Of course, the European Council will not disregard the other important challenges that lie ahead of us. The EU continues to function. Thus, the second major debate by Heads of State and Government will focus on the question of rising food and oil prices. It is a fact that rising commodity prices contributed to the escalation of inflation of food prices, and to the overall inflation within the EU. In particular, families with low incomes were most directly hit by these high prices.

Globally, the most affected are developing countries as net food importers. It is vital for the European Union to play its part in devising appropriate responses and to demonstrate unity in its measures for dealing with the consequences, not only with a focus on the poorest sectors of the EU population, but also in developing countries. Therefore, it is expected that the European Council will endorse the necessary steps within the EU and at the international level. Allow me to present them briefly.

The European Union has already taken measures to alleviate the pressure on food prices through the sale of intervention stocks, the reduction in export refunds, the removal of the set-aside requirement for 2008, the increase of milk quotas, and the suspension of import duties for cereals, thus improving supply and helping to stabilise agricultural markets. Given that low income families are the hardest hit, it is quite natural for Member States to envisage short-term measures to alleviate the pressure of high prices on them particularly.

However, the European Council must look to the longer term. Nobody really expects food or oil prices to return to the previous levels anytime soon. I am convinced that the next Presidency will achieve, in close cooperation with the European Parliament, a timely agreement on the CAP health check which will comprise measures for enhancing agricultural production and ensuring the security of food supply.
We also need to pay attention to bio-fuel policies and find a way of ensuring their sustainability, both within the EU and also in other countries. It will be important to encourage the development of second generation bio-fuels. More generally, we need to pursue work on innovation and research and development in the agricultural sector to enhance its efficiency and productivity. Among the initiatives to be pursued at the international level, the European Council intends to point out the Union’s contribution to global endeavours for mitigating the effects of rising prices on those living in poverty.

This will include an appeal for a better coordinated international response to the crisis caused by rising food prices, particularly in the framework of the United Nations and the G8 group; support for open trade policies; rapid reactions to immediate short-term humanitarian needs; and encouraging targeted assistance to boost agriculture in developing countries. In addition to high food prices, the EU faces rising oil prices. This calls for an adjustment of the European economy, and a special debate to address this issue is planned for today.

A further priority of the Presidency is that the European Council should stress those measures taken to enhance the European perspective of the Western Balkans. In particular, I would like to underline the completion of a series of Stabilisation and Association Agreements, and the launch of dialogue on visa liberalisation with all countries of the region, as well as the submission of roadmaps. Furthermore, Heads of State and Government will emphasize the importance of involving all Western Balkans countries in regional cooperation, and welcome a series of sectoral initiatives. The Western Balkans is a region surrounded by EU Member States, and therefore urgently needs confirmation of its European perspective and assistance in implementing reforms. The Presidency highly values the support of the European Parliament in this respect.

Another major item on the agenda will be progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). 2008 is the halfway point in the timeline for achieving these goals. As the largest donor of development aid, the European Union is aware of its responsibility and is willing to play an active role in encouraging the international community to strive for achievement of the MDGs. The European Council will therefore stress the key role of the EU at international conferences and its commitments.

The third set of issues to be discussed by the European Council will be about economic, social and environmental matters. First of all, I would like to touch on the review of work accomplished regarding the climate-energy package. The Slovenian Presidency has achieved all the set objectives relating to the package in question. Of crucial importance were the political decisions adopted at the March meeting of the European Council. The European Council will also take note of the agreement reached in the field of energy market liberalisation, something that was debated in Parliament yesterday.

On the basis of conclusions from December 2007, the European Council will also review progress made in key dossiers pertaining to the area of migration, justice and terrorism. Finally, Heads of State and Government will address issues relating to European Neighbourhood Policy. Building on and reinforcing previous successes, the ‘Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean’ will bring further momentum to the Union’s relations with the Mediterranean countries. It will complement ongoing bilateral relations, which will continue within existing policy frameworks. The European Council is expected to welcome the recent proposals for developing an eastern partnership within European Neighbourhood Policy.

In the margins of the meeting, Heads of State and Government will discuss the Commission’s proposal for the accession of the Slovak Republic as the sixteenth Member State to the Economic and Monetary Union on 1 January 2009. I would therefore like to extend my special congratulations to the Slovak Republic.

In short, the views and debates in this Parliament have made a major contribution to formulating the agenda of the European Council. The debate that will now take place and which we will follow closely, will also represent a useful and important contribution to the discussion among Heads of State and Government, so I shall listen to it with great interest.

(Applause)

José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission. – Madam President, the European Council starting tomorrow has a heavy agenda covering many issues where citizens expect Europe to act.

(Some Members on the right, who were wearing green T-shirts, stood up to display banners and posters calling for respect for the ‘no’ vote in Ireland. The President asked them to remove the banners and posters.)

The issues are the surge in oil and food prices, climate change and energy security, migration and asylum to name but a few.
But of course foremost in everybody’s mind will be the ‘no’ vote in Ireland. This ‘no’ vote was a disappointment to all those in favour of a stronger, more efficient and accountable European Union. The Lisbon Treaty remains essential to help us respond to the challenges that Europe faces today; to have a more democratic Union, increasing the powers of this Parliament and recognising the role of national parliaments in European politics; to enhance Europe’s capacity to act in areas like migration, energy, climate change, internal security; to increase Europe’s coherence and effectiveness on the global stage.

These challenges have not gone away. The truth is that the ‘no’ vote did not solve the problems which the Treaty seeks to tackle.

For the last six years we have spent a lot of energy on institutional issues. With so many key issues pressing for action today we cannot afford this energy to go to waste, and the world does not stop and wait for Europe.

As I said last week, the Commission fully respects the outcome of the Irish referendum. We must show the same respect for all national ratifications,

(Applause)

whether they have chosen to take the route of referendum or of parliamentary ratification. There have been 19 democratic decisions in the process so far: 18 in favour of the Lisbon Treaty; one against. Eight other Member States still have to take position.

The Irish Government has set out clearly its respect for the right of other countries to continue their ratification processes. This is, I believe, self-evident. All the countries in Europe are equal; all the countries have the right to express their opinion.

(Applause)

While it is clear that the Lisbon Treaty cannot enter into force before unanimity about its ratification, it is also clear that an Irish vote decides on the Irish position but cannot determine the position of other countries.

I expect the Member States that did not ratify the Lisbon Treaty to continue their own ratification processes.

(Applause)

The European Council gives us all an opportunity to listen very carefully to what Prime Minister Cowen will say. Then we must work very closely with the Irish Government to help solve this problem. Let me be clear: Ireland has a responsibility to contribute to finding a solution. When governments sign the Treaty they assume a responsibility to have it ratified. But let me be equally clear: this is a time for us to be serious about solidarity. Twenty-seven Member States signed the Treaty; we must make every effort to make sure that 27 Member States find a way forward. Member States are equal in their dignity and we should be clear about that.

This will take time and effort for the Irish, but also for all of us. I do not think that we can rush into a premature decision about the next step. We need to take the time to find a real consensus and see what is possible for Ireland. But equally we should not take too long. I know that this Parliament is keen to give voters clarity on the way forward by the time of the European elections.

The European Commission is ready to make its contribution – and I am sure this Parliament is too – but there is no way around the fact that governments have a particular responsibility here: in signing the Treaty, in making sure it is ratified, in promoting the European project in their national public opinions. And on this last point let me make a general comment that I think may be useful for the debate that is going on now. Years of treating the European institutions as a convenient scapegoat leaves fertile ground for populist campaigns.

(Applause)

As I have said several times before, you cannot bash Brussels or Strasbourg from Monday to Saturday and expect citizens to vote in favour of Europe on Sunday.

(Applause)

Tomorrow the European Council will also stress that the ‘no’ vote must not be a reason for the European Union to fall into the trap of institutional navel-gazing. We have made important progress in the past couple of years and it has been on the back of a determined effort to deliver policies in the interests of European citizens. At a time when rising food and oil prices are leading to great expectations for action, we cannot
afford to abandon this path. That is why I very much welcome Prime Minister Janez Janša and the Slovenian presidency's decision to ring-fence the debate on Lisbon to the dinner on Thursday night and to devote the rest of the European Council to furthering our policy agenda.

Today, everyone is feeling the pressure of price rises in food and fuel but for some there is an extra burden. For poorer households these costs are a bigger share of the household budget so the rises hit even harder. The same is true for some economic activities, with fuel so critical for some industries.

In two communications on food and oil prices the Commission has made a careful analysis of the causes of the price rises, of where the squeeze is most intense and of what we can and should do.

The European Union needs to show that it is bringing to bear the full range of measures available at European and national level. We need to take a dynamic and imaginative look at the tools at our disposal – to look at what will have a real impact in the short, medium and long term. Let us remember previous oil shocks where Europe failed to learn the long-term lessons. Let us hope this time it will be not as it happened in the past, where after all the oil shocks we came back to business as usual. I hope this time we really have an opportunity to change, and to change the paradigm of energy consumption in Europe and in the world.

To alleviate problems on food inside the European Union we will come forward with proposals to extend our scheme to distribute food to the most deprived before seeking a two-thirds increase in the budget for this specific area.

In addition, the European Union has tools which can and will be brought to bear: to monitor prices, to use competition powers to check the food supply chain, boosting reserves, ensuring that the CAP is well attuned to the current realities of the agricultural market.

As for oil prices, immediate steps are justified to help the most hard-pressed households. However, it will be futile for governments to use public money to offset energy-price rises that are here, most likely, to stay. We should also look at the levels available to the European Union in areas such as competition and taxation. The Commission will come up with proposals to increase transparency in emergency and commercial oil stocks. We will also come with proposals on taxation to support and facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy, namely in the field of energy efficiency. We will also support a high-level meeting of producers and consumers of oil and fossil fuel energy.

Specifically on fisheries: we will come forward with an emergency package to address problems of economic and social hardship, allowing Member States to give short-term emergency aid, and we will look again at the rules on small-scale state aid. I have three points here. First, it must be coordinated: we should avoid a rash of national initiatives which simply displace the problems elsewhere in the Union. Secondly, we must target our alleviation efforts on the worst-hit segments of the fleet. Thirdly, we must find structural solutions to overcapacity in the fishing industry.

The pressures being faced by Europeans today show why the European Union's goals on energy security, energy efficiency and climate change are so crucial to the well-being of European society, and this is why they are more urgent than ever. As demand continues to outstrip supply in oil and gas, the goals agreed last year provide a ready-made path to reduce Europe’s vulnerability and to reduce the economic pain of future price hikes. The key aspects of the package of proposals that we have put forward and are now being considered by this Parliament will make a decisive contribution.

The basic idea is the following: the prices of energy most likely will never go back to previous levels, so there is a structural problem there. We can, and we should, have short-term answers, namely for those who are the most vulnerable in our societies. However, for a structural problem we need a structural answer, a structural response. The structural response is our climate change and renewables package; it is not to be dependent on fossil fuels but to promote renewables and to do more in terms of energy efficiency. That is the basic line we should follow.

(Applause)

So I hope that now in Europe those who still have doubts about the importance of changing our energy paradigm, those who still have doubts about the need to fight climate change, will understand at last that, if not because of that but because of energy security and because of the need to increase our competitiveness in our economy, we really need to deliver on our commitments regarding climate change and renewables.
The structural response to the structural challenges we face basically is to save and diversify. By saving I mean increasing energy efficiency where we have a huge unexploited potential. Diversification covers both the sources and the geographical origin of energy. Both are about increasing Europe's energy security. Adoption of our climate change and energy security package is, therefore, a matter of urgency. The task of the European Council will be to give a signal about this and to prepare everything to reach a political agreement at the latest, we hope, by next December.

I think it is an important task of the European Council to show that the ‘no’ vote on the Lisbon Treaty is not an excuse to avoid action. It should not mean paralysis for Europe. We must show that we will find the right way to secure the efficient and democratic Europe the Treaty has been designed to deliver.

Let me conclude with a more political remark. I think we – those who have supported and are supporting the Lisbon Treaty, this Parliament and the Commission – should not make apologies for that, because the competition outside is stronger than ever; it will be tougher than ever. What we need is a European Union that works better for our citizens, to deliver on the real challenges that face us. Those challenges will remain: the problems of energy security, the problem of climate change, the problems of international terrorism, the problems of increased competition coming from emerging powers, and the problems of migration.

Those challenges are there and we need to tackle them in a more efficient manner.

Therefore, let us not now put the blame on the European Union. Let us be honest about it. It is true that very often when we hold a referendum we have seen a ‘no’ vote regarding Europe. But let us be completely honest. If there were a referendum on most of our national policies and most of our initiatives, would we always have a ‘yes’ vote? Therefore, let us not always put the blame on the European Union or the European intuitions. The truth is that, today, to take political decisions at European, national or regional level is a very tough matter.

Therefore, we have to be wise, prudent and serious about it. We should not always put the blame on the European Union. On the contrary, we should work to make it better: be modest about the setbacks, understand what is not going well, make our improvements and not give up on our commitment. I believe the best way to do that is to avoid pessimism and not to go back to a situation of crisophilie, a crisis for the sake of a crisis. Pessimism will not solve this problem. It is true we have a serious problem, but we should solve it and not fall back into depression.

The best way to show that we are committed to our project – and in that regard I would also like to welcome the intentions of the French presidency – is to work concretely on the most important areas where the European Union can deliver and help our Member States deliver on those problems that are really the first concern of our citizens. I hope that we will not be demoralised by this and will keep our line. What we need, of course, is sailors and navigators for fair weather but also for stormy times. I believe we should stay on course and go on with our project so that Europe is more necessary than ever.

(Applause)

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (FR) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Mr President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, the majority of Irish people who voted expressed their opposition to the Lisbon Treaty. My Group respects that decision just as it also respects that of the 18 Member States that have to date expressed their support for the Treaty and ratified it.

The European Union is founded on freedom of expression and democracy. Therefore, because we are democrats, we want all of the Member States to express their opinion on the ratification of the Treaty. It is only at the end of this process that the European Council will be able to decide which path to take; in other words – not to take anything away from Ireland’s decision – no Member State should deprive the others of freely expressing their position.

We hope that this week the European Council will carry out a calm, responsible and constructive analysis of the situation ensuing from this vote. The PPE members of my Group hope that the European Council will ask the Member States that have not yet done so to continue with their ratification procedures as is only fit and proper.

Ladies and gentlemen, the people of Ireland have spoken. They have voiced their concerns about the purpose of European integration, about the way in which Europe is run, about the future of the agricultural policy, about the WTO negotiations, about the tax policy. The Irish vote also reflects the fact that many people do not understand the complexity of the European Union, whose relevance is not always evident to them. It is a manifestation of the question many citizens are asking about the very purpose of European integration.
My motivation and that of my generation – in other words, ensuring peace in our continent – is no longer understood by the younger generations.

The Irish ‘no’ vote is a plea for a better definition of Europe’s goals and a better explanation of the reasons for pursuing further integration. The European Parliament, which adopts texts that are often difficult to read, must play a full role in this exercise. By voting ‘no’, however, did the Irish mean that when it comes to climate and energy, the new food order, personal safety, immigration or foreign policy our countries are self-sufficient and can act on an equal footing with the United States, China, India or Brazil? I do not think so. By voting ‘no’, did the Irish mean that solidarity with the poorest countries, from which they have significantly and rightly benefited in recent decades, is no longer relevant and that the rule from now on is every man for himself? I do not think so. Finally, by voting ‘no’ did the Irish want to turn over a new leaf as far as European integration is concerned and were they expressing a negative opinion on the accession of a country like Croatia? I do not think so.

The PPE members of my Group firmly believe that the Lisbon Treaty, which was the subject of long negotiations and which was signed by the 27 Member States, is a major step forward in comparison to the Nice Treaty. It enables Europe to function better and it gives it the tools it needs to be speak with a louder voice on the world stage. I have only one wish and that is for Europe’s period of introspection to come to an end as quickly as possible. It is time for our countries – if I may use the expression – to overcome the real problems and the real challenges. These challenges should spur us to action and they also give rise to serious concerns, and sometimes anger, as we will see once again in Brussels on Thursday, among all those who are weakened and handicapped by the current situation.

Mr President-in-Office, my request is that tomorrow in the Council you take account of the real problems, of the welfare of our fellow European citizens, and deal head-on with all of the increases that are worrying our citizens.

In this heated debate, the PPE members of my Group are calling for calm and reason. We must listen to the Irish, we must learn from their vote and we must treat the people of the other European nations with the same respect.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, on behalf of the PSE Group, – (DE) Madam President, for eight years now, we have constantly been ratifying some treaty or other. We have been ratifying ourselves to death. During these eight years, the European Union has undergone a period of introspection and has focused on its own institutional reforms, albeit without much success. This is the same European Union that requires accession candidates to undertake transformation processes, and yet it is apparently unable to manage this for itself. How much credibility does that leave us?

Commission President, you have said, quite correctly, that Europe’s institutions are not to blame and we should not allow them always to be made the scapegoat. You are absolutely right, but exactly who is making them the scapegoat? In Europe’s capitals, there are a great many people who will convene for the Council on Thursday, and each time they go back home, if the Council meeting in Brussels has been successful, they say: ‘It was all down to us, the heads of state and government’, and if it was unsuccessful, they say, ‘It was their fault, the people in Brussels!’ You should tell the Council what you have told us here. Incidentally, the debate conducted with you here in this House takes place in public, but the heads of state and government will be meeting on Thursday behind closed doors yet again. There needs to be a stop to that as well. It is the Member States who bear the responsibility!

(Applause)

We have a downward spiral, a negative spiral, which is a dangerous one. The process of European integration is on the line. The Irish have had their referendum and we must respect the results, but there was an element which perturbed me greatly.

With the exception of Sinn Féin – and I will not waste words on them here – all the Irish parties, the PPE-DE, the Liberals and our own party were calling for a ‘yes’, and the Irish people voted ‘no’. This is the wake-up call, and everyone, including us here in this Chamber, is affected by the fact that there is a crisis of confidence, a crisis of mistrust, vis-à-vis the national institutions, and indeed the supranational institutions. I can do without your applause. Whether Irish sovereignty is represented by UKIP’s ideology is debatable, in my view. The Irish can do without your protection. Let me say this very clearly: we must stand together in response to this crisis of confidence, and we must take it seriously.
Commission President, I have been wondering when you would finally say a word or two about your Commissioner McCreevy today.

(Applause)

This is the man who is responsible for internal market policy in the European Union: the same internal market which, due to its social inequality, more and more citizens are understandably viewing as a threat, not an opportunity. This man, who is responsible in your Commission for the internal market, goes to Ireland and says that he has not read the Lisbon Treaty and would not expect voters to do so either. How can that possibly increase public confidence?

(Applause)

Let me say this: the best social policy measure for Europe that you could propose on 3 July is to withdraw this portfolio from Mr McCreevy, for he has proved that he is not up to the job. I cannot accept a Commissioner for the Internal Market who represents such a skewed approach to politics. Deregulating the internal market to breaking point is what Mr McCreevy wants to do, regardless of what it costs, without any social flanking measures at EU level or in the Member States: that is the crisis which is being felt by Europe’s citizens! When it comes to this particular Commissioner, you need to take action!

(Applause)

I would also have liked to hear you say something about the crisis in the financial markets. I have yet to hear you say a word about the turmoil in the financial markets. Let me also address a comment to Mr Daul: there are 21 heads of government across the European Union who belong to your political family or the Liberals, and an equally large number of Members of the Commission. The PPE-DE Group in this House is, I gladly admit, open-minded when it comes to certain social policy measures. I urge you to talk to your heads of government at last, and to talk to your colleagues in the Council!

What Europe needs is concerted action in the social arena. You have the majority in Europe, in the Council, in the Commission and also here in this House. For once, you could demonstrate the social responsibility that you have just been calling for. I invite you to do so, for example in relation to my colleague Paul Nyrup Rasmussen's report on control of the international financial markets. I invite you to follow up your grand statements on social responsibility with some action. A warm welcome to you, Mr Daul!

(Applause)

We will find a way out of this impasse, I am certain of that. In one way or another, we will undoubtedly get the Irish back on board. However, that will not help us! We must recognise that there was once a time when the pro-European movement had a heart and soul. As Mr Daul pointed out, this was after the war, when Europe's peacemaking mystique melded people together. Now, it is the anti-Europe movement which has the heart and soul, and you can see that they are extremely active. They raced round Ireland, climbed staircases, rang doorbells, canvassed and distributed their campaign materials. They were in evidence everywhere. Where were the pro-Europeans? Where is the movement which campaigns for European integration? Where is the passion that we once had? The passion has migrated to the other side, the side which speaks ill of Europe, on the right wing of the political spectrum. It lies with those who speak ill of Europe, and who do so simply because they are afraid. In Europe, however, this mixture of social decline and fear has always opened the door to fascism.

I therefore appeal to all the constructive democratic forces in Europe to take this movement seriously! Let us finally join forces again for one purpose: to remind ourselves that there has never been a more successful project to safeguard peace in Europe and the world than the transnational, intercultural, inter-faith movement which is based on a balance of social interests and is called the European Union. It is a project worth fighting for, because we cannot let these people gain the upper hand.

(Applause)

**Graham Watson, on behalf of the ALDE Group.** – Madam President, as the Irish Prime Minister sets out for Brussels tomorrow, he might well chew over the words of the Irish pop group U2: ‘Where did it all go wrong?’

The other heads of state and government should also reflect why, on the threshold of a new French presidency, we have come full circle since the last: from Nice to Nice.
There is clear evidence that a majority in every Member State supports the European Union. There is scant evidence that a majority in any favours further construction. We cannot say for sure that any treaty would get a majority in any country. Trust in institutions is ebbing away.

So it is no good for blithe spirits in Berlin to whistle that other U2 hit 'With or without you', or for people in Paris to push Ireland into voting again. As Brecht pointed out, you cannot dissolve the people. Though fewer than a million voted against, and in a landscape littered with lies, the people are not persuaded.

Why? First, because we’ve done little to convince them of the changes we champion. The Commission has a Plan ‘D’ for Dialogue, but our Member State governments have no equivalent. Certainly there is a role for Parliament and Commission in explaining the European Union – but also for every national government, every single day, not just when ratification of the latest treaty is due. And there is a job here, too, not just for political parties at European level, but for political parties in every Member State.

Second, while the EU has created great wealth, it is now amassed less honestly and spread less fairly. Our political and our business leaders must come to grips with huge ethical issues. And Mr Schulz, I am sorry you have only five heads of state of government these days, but those issues are no less valid in the countries run by Socialists than they are in any other!

(Applause)

Third, for all the freedoms for goods and for capital – and even for services – our Union is not famed for freedoms for its people. Cross-border complications in civil law – custody of children in divorce cases, problems with properties abroad – fill the mailbags of MEPs. A lack of safeguards in cross-border criminal cases and a cavalier approach to data protection add to that unease. What the EU promises in theory, it too often fails to deliver in practice.

This is the backdrop against which our response to Ireland must be measured. Here in this House, we want the new Treaty. We know it helps put right these wrongs. But beyond this forest of metal and glass, this is too little understood.

So my group’s advice to Council is this. Get on with the real business of Europe: boosting trade, combating climate change, fighting food and fuel price rises. Let those who will continue to ratify the Treaty. If necessary, make do with Nice. Use the passerelle clause to speed up Europe’s problem-solving potential. Forget the full-time president until you settle what the six-month stagiaire is going to do. Launch a comprehensive campaign to remind people why the EU exists, inform them how it works and explain why, like the proverbial pint of Guinness, it is good for you.

Europe means too much to too many to allow this crisis to stop it in its tracks.

(Applause)

Monica Frassoni, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we have always said that what the European Union needs is a short constitution, with a charter of binding rights, democratic and transparent decision-making procedures, limited but genuine powers and the requisite economic resources. Such a constitution, ladies and gentlemen, should be drawn up by this House or by a constituent assembly, upheld with vigour and conviction, without hypocrisy, and ratified by the parliamentary method or in a European referendum.

I have great respect for the wishes of the Irish people, but no one will ever convince me that a referendum in which half of the electorate turned out is more democratic than parliamentary ratification. If the majority of peoples and states vote yes, one goes ahead, and those who vote no can cheerfully remain outside and negotiate a system of new, looser relations, as the Spinelli Treaty of 1984 put it.

What has happened in recent years? The Member States and the Commission have gone down the road of a complicated, contradictory treaty that is difficult to sell and, in the final stages, was negotiated in secret, in haste, and made even more illegible by its exemptions and protocols. Meanwhile they decided that it had to be ratified unanimously, exactly like the gardener’s dog that neither eats cabbage itself nor lets anybody else.

As if that were not enough, the European Union is continuing to adopt misguided, weak policies, such as the Jackson directive yesterday and the Weber report today, which are incapable of offering us any positive prospects or hope. This is a Union where everything from workers’ rights to environmental protection to migrants’ rights is given less and less consideration, where industrial lobbies count for more than citizens, where the European interest is lost, buried beneath the howls of one government or another, where freedom
of choice and individual liberties or the arrival of new Europeans are seen as an unbearable attack on the identity of populations which, like those of Italy and Ireland, have migrants scattered in every part of the world.

It is possible, and perhaps also desirable, that the countries having yet to ratify will do so. It may be that the Irish Government will come up with a brilliant proposal. But a diplomatic solution is not enough! A diplomatic solution is not enough. Now more than ever we need to state loud and clear that the Europe of governments – opaque and obscure – is the Europe that has failed: the one that rejected the constitution and is continuing to pursue misguided, conservative, narrow-mindedly nationalist and egotistical policies; the one that put paid to the spirit of the 2003 European Convention, ending up instead with an agreement on a positive but minimalistic, soulless text.

However, none of this makes a more democratic, proactive, united Europe any less necessary. What is needed today is an initiative stemming from our political strengths and from those Member States which are convinced of the need for a more efficient, more democratic, more cohesive Europe, given that it is now no longer necessary or possible to continue with the Treaty of Nice. Such an initiative will have no scope for those unwilling to move forward.

Brian Crowley, on behalf of the UEN Group. – Madam President, I should like to thank the President-in-Office, the President of the Commission and my colleagues for their contributions so far.

Obviously, what has occurred was not anticipated. The ‘no’ vote in Ireland represents a sea-change with regard to the opinion of one set of voters within the European Union towards the European Union project. Because of the diversity of those who opposed this Treaty in the referendum in Ireland, because of the different viewpoints – both politically and ideologically opposite to each other on many occasions – it is difficult to extrapolate from that exactly why the people voted ‘no’.

What we have requested is that we be given time to look at and analyse those results, to find ways to move forward and what can be done. Because this – even people on the ‘no’ side claim – was not a vote against Europe, despite the fact that some on the ‘no’ side have voted ‘no’ on every single European referendum since Ireland first acceded in 1972. But they claim that this is not a vote against Europe. Likewise, they claim this is not a way of reducing what Europe does. But their big slogan during the campaign was ‘vote “no” for a stronger Europe’. Maybe now those on the ‘no’ side could come forward and tell us what kind of stronger Europe they want to see happening, what solutions they wish to bring forward as regards how we move forward in dealing with the global challenges and difficulties that face us.

Today in Brussels we have farmers and hauliers protesting at the high price of fuel. This time last year a barrel of oil cost USD 48; today it is USD 140. This time last year the price of food in Haiti was affordable for even the poorest people; today there are riots in the streets of Haiti because of the shortage of food and the difficulties this creates. These are the challenges that we must respond to at a European level; these are the difficulties that we must tackle.

Let us not forget the world is not going to collapse. We have been here before: both the French and the Dutch said ‘no’ to a previous treaty and a mechanism was found to organise and advance the European project.

This is not a time for recrimination or finger-pointing. However, despite what some of the protesters within this Chamber may think, this is a time for respect: not just respect for the Irish voters, who gave their democratic opinion with regard to this Treaty, but respect for the other countries and their individual rights on how they operate and how they ratify a treaty. It is not up to us to dictate to anybody what advances can and cannot be made.

I say to those who wear T-shirts inside this House that not only do they disrespect this House and the Members of this House, but they in no way stand for or represent the Irish people or the Irish nation.

(Applause)

I want to make it clear that those same flag-wavers over here on my left, those same people who claim to defend the rights of Irish people were the same people who appeared on Irish television celebrating a ‘no’ vote in Ireland in a pub in Brussels. Of course drink was consumed, but what respect do they have for the Irish people and the Irish flag that they use the Irish flag as a tablecloth to put their drinks on? That is what this group represents; that is the kind of disrespect they have for the people.

(Applause)
Allow us to move forward. The European project is one worth saving. It is not just about peace or prosperity, it is about solidarity. Many years ago Sean O’Casey, the Irish poet, wrote in *Juno and the Paycock*: ‘I often looked up at the sky an’ assed meself the question – what is the moon, what is the stars?’ Maybe today we have to ask ourselves a question for this generation: what does the European Union actually mean and where do we want it go?

(Applause)

Francis Wurtz, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group, – (FR) Madam President, Mr President of the Commission, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, the European Council would be well-advised to refrain from displaying any sort of arrogance towards the people of Ireland, who merely exercised a democratic right recognised by their Constitution. Rather than calling for the continuation of the ratification process in an attempt to isolate this new black sheep, it would be better to knuckle down to a clear analysis of the situation. The Irish ‘no’ vote was particularly strong among the working classes and I would remind you that turnout was much higher than in the past; according to my Group, this reveals that the crisis surrounding the legitimacy of the current European model is growing ever deeper. This crisis was already at the heart of the French and Dutch ‘no’ votes; it is expressed differently elsewhere but it is always an underlying element.

Remember the large-scale protests against the Bolkestein Directive; think of the debate that arose after the Laval and Viking affairs, particularly in Scandinavian countries, or in Germany after the Rüffert judgment. In this respect, I want to say to my friend Martin Schulz that I agree completely with what he said about Mr McCreevy. The problem is that those decisions – the ones I have just mentioned – were taken not by Mr McCreevy but by the Court of Justice on the basis of specific articles (Articles 43 and 49 of the current Treaties incorporated in the Lisbon Treaty). Think, too, of the political impact of the powerful strike in Dacia, Romania against ‘low-cost Europe’. Look at the anger of farmers or small-scale fishermen who are in dire straits. What lies at the root of all these situations is first and foremost the current European economic and social model: instead of providing security, it leads to greater insecurity. That is the number one problem.

Another factor is the way in which the Union functions. Decisions are taken far from the people and without the people. We are content with explaining them to them rather then consulting them. The deliberate decision to present the Lisbon Treaty in a form that is totally illegible to a lay person is, in this respect, a spectacular illustration of what I would call ‘the ivory tower syndrome’. This has devastating effects on our citizens, especially the less populated nations, which feel as though they are being bandied about to satisfy the interests of the more powerful nations.

Finally, there are more and more questions in many countries, including Ireland, about the role Europe plays in the world, where it is expected to ensure that there is a much stronger emphasis on the force of politics rather than the politics of force. Running away from these debates means exacerbating the crisis in Europe; conducting them in complete transparency would be a first step on the road to finding a solution.

Nigel Farage, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group, – Madam President, nobody else has said it, but I will: well done the Irish!

(Applause from certain quarters)

And yet, before the official result was out, there was Mr Barroso, holding a press conference in Brussels, looking as shifty and as dishonest as anybody I have ever seen, saying – despite what the rules of the club are – that the Treaty is not dead and we continue. Frankly, it was a disgusting display; it was an insult to democracy. It is perfectly clear that the ratifications should stop now and the implementation of the Treaty should stop now.

I used to think, after the French and Dutch results, that you were in denial, but now I realise that what is behind this is a new phenomenon: it is ‘EU nationalism’, and it is the most dangerous political phenomenon to have swept Europe since 1945. You ignore the voters, you are destroying democracy, and you have shown that you will stop at nothing. Well, ask yourself: why are the politicians, why is this class, now unpopular? Well, later on today, Mr Barroso, this House will be voting for a new Justice Commissioner, and it is likely that a former convicted fraudster will, after today, be the Justice Commissioner for the European Union.

In fact you do not need the UK Independence Party. You are destroying the European Union in the eyes of the voters. Well done everybody!

(Applause from certain quarters)
Ashley Mote (NI). – Madam President, may I remind this House that the rule of law is more important than the laws themselves.

(Loud protests)

Lisbon required unanimity. Ignore that and you ignore the rule of law itself. The Irish are not just 10% of the EU, they are 100% of those allowed to vote and they all know, we all know, that others would have voted ‘no’ given the chance.

(Further loud protests)

Lisbon was incomprehensible and the Irish knew why. Others would have voted ‘no’ given the chance. Suggesting now that the process should go on, devising clever ways of regenerating Lisbon in open defiance of public will, is an arrogance of breathtaking proportions and we have seen it all before. The Austrian Foreign Minister stood here after the rejection of the previous Treaty and boasted about 36 projects and institutions still going ahead; they still have no legitimacy after the failure of the Lisbon Treaty to get unanimity.

I have a message for you from Edmund Burke: ‘The people are the masters, not you, and you ignore that and the rule of law at your peril’.

(Applause from certain quarters)

IN THE CHAIR: MR COCILovo
Vice-President

José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, I would on this occasion like to highlight the remarkable consensus in this House on the next steps to be taken. We believe, with just a few exceptions that merely add colour to the debate, that it would be wise for all the Member States to complete their ratification processes. That is also the opinion that has been expressed by the Irish Government and by the Members, specifically Mr Crowley, who is Irish and who has stated that all the countries have the same right to express their opinion. If we can thus conclude this process, we will be in a position to discuss the matter constructively with our Irish friends in a spirit of solidarity, for there can be no union without solidarity. I believe that this is the consensus that is being consolidated, and I hope that it will be consolidated by the debate in the European Council tomorrow and beyond. In any event, it is the position that the Commission is going to present to the European Council.

At the same time, as many of you have pointed out, including Mr Watson and others, it is important not to become paralysed by examining solely the institutional question. The best way of consolidating the European Union’s democratic legitimacy is to provide results and to demonstrate that we are working for our citizens; indeed, the world cannot wait for Europe to take its institutional decisions. There are urgent issues such as climate change, energy security and migration that demand responses from the Union, even with the current institutional framework.

Another point, which I would address to my good friend Mr Schulz, is that we need to avoid finding easy scapegoats. Obviously I was not particularly pleased with the comments made by my fellow Commissioner, Mr McCreevy. However, I could also mention certain comments by national politicians that were not helpful in this process, and even Members of this House who do not always say what we want to hear.

Let us be realistic! In the constituency in which Mr McCreevy campaigned, the ‘yes’ vote won, and I think that attacking the Irish Commissioner now is not the best way to ensure successful dialogue with our Irish friends. We must concentrate on the positive aspects without trying to find easy scapegoats; that would not be fair. If we act in a spirit of cooperation with our institutions, if we concentrate on the results the citizens expect from us, if we find the best atmosphere for this dialogue, I believe that it will be possible to resolve this problem. It is a serious problem, but it is a problem that can be resolved. We will not resolve it with recriminations, nor with pessimism, ‘crisophilie’ or talk of decline. We will resolve it by endeavouring, through our results, to reinforce our democratic legitimacy and by recognising that all of us must act, in the European institutions and in the national governments, and that we have a shared responsibility to keep our ideal, our European ideal alive.

(Applause)

Philip Bushill-Matthews (PPE-DE). – Mr President, the EU as we know is based upon four freedoms: freedom of movement of people, goods, capital and services. The first of those freedoms is about people.
When Jean Monnet shared his vision of Europe all those years ago, he said – if colleagues will forgive my mangled French – ‘Nous ne coalisons pas des États, nous unissons des hommes’.

The EU is supposed to be about people, not about politicians so, not only does it need to be driven by the people, the people need to see and believe that it is driven by the people. Last Thursday we heard the people speak and their verdict was clear; the answer was a simple ‘no’.

I recall the background to the first Constitution Treaty. There was recognition that the EU was becoming more remote from the people and that there was a need to do something about it. The declared solution was to prepare a Treaty that would make the EU more simple, more transparent, more close to the people. But, by the time politicians had finished with it, they had produced a Treaty which was more complicated, more opaque and even further away from the people. Certainly, that is what the people believe still about this latest Treaty.

Our response cannot be to carry on as if nothing has happened. If the people perceive that the EU is moving further away from them, then for the politicians to carry on regardless will simply make this problem worse. Our problem must not be to discuss the speed at which the EU should now move; it should be to discuss its direction. Listen to the people and they will tell you.

If the ratification process continues, it will show that EU leaders have learnt nothing and that politicians still believe they know best and that it is the people who are wrong.

By definition, the people are always right. It is called democracy. We want an EU which is people-centred and which delivers that democracy. So we must not ignore the Irish vote; we should build upon it. The ratification process should stop. The listening to the people should begin.

(Applause)

To conclude: Martin Schulz said in his very powerful and elegant speech that there is a crisis of confidence. I agree with him. It is the people who have lost confidence with the politicians. It is an opportunity for us to recognise this, to show that we have listened, and to regain and rebuild their trust. It is not good enough for all of us just to become great speakers; we have to show we can be great listeners too.

(Applause)

**Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (PSE).** – Mr President, no, no, no! What the honourable Member has just said is not democracy. Democracy is to say, ‘We respect the Irish, as we respect every other Member State’s decisions’. Therefore, I endorse the remarks made by the President of the Commission: we have a consensus here in Parliament on the process, respecting the Irish but respecting also all the other Member States. Let us continue the process; this is what we have to continue today.

Second point: no more pauses, please! No more ‘reflection’ thing. No more wishy-washiness. Let us focus on the real problems: that is what we have to do.

Of course, President Barroso has to defend his Commissioners, including Mr McCreevy. When we criticise Mr McCreevy, this is not a personal issue. When the chairman of my group mentions Mr McCreevy, it is because of his policy – and his policy is also Mr Barroso’s policy.

Mr Barroso said many wise things today, but when he was talking about competition powers I did not hear anything about speculation on the financial markets against food prices. I would have liked to have heard that, and I would have liked to have heard that from Mr McCreevy. I did not hear Mr Barroso say, when he was talking about the economic thing, that we are lacking jobs in Europe. I would have liked to have heard him say that, due to the financial crisis, we are losing jobs. I would like to see the Commission coming up with a new economic revitalisation plan – not a theoretical one, but a coordinated investment action.

Thirdly, Mr McCreevy is right now trying to say that the whole reason why we have a financial crisis is the agencies and bureaux – Standard & Poors, FTSE and others – and that we are going to regulate them. But that is, in a sense, to shoot the messenger. I really feel that the Commission President should say to us today: yes, I agree, we have a financial crisis and, yes, I agree, we need to have universal regulation, better than the one we have, so that our answer can be new jobs and a better climate, not more money and not more focus on how to create money from nothing, instead of production and jobs. Give us that impression today and you have the real message for ordinary people.
Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, as an Irish Member, I represent the 54% who voted ‘no’ and the 46% who voted ‘yes’. Those who are true democrats look not only to the result but strive to represent all of the people.

I represent a sovereign state but you cannot uphold the sovereignty of your own Member State – in my case, Ireland – unless you uphold the sovereignty of all Member States. In this context, if other Member States decide to exercise their sovereignty and ratify the Lisbon Treaty, or otherwise, no real democrat, no flag-flying democrat who today claims to be Irish, can legitimately object. Ireland speaks for Ireland; Slovenia for Slovenia. That is real democracy and that is real sovereignty.

A core issue in the Lisbon debate in Ireland was the principle of unanimity. For Lisbon to be ratified, we need unanimity. All 27 Member States must agree – that is core. This is the first real test of unanimity under Lisbon. We must not fail that test and therein lies the challenge. As politicians, our job is to rise to that challenge, to listen to our citizens, to find solutions and to get on with the business of building a better Europe. Some on the ‘no’ side in Ireland spoke of a better deal. Let us be optimistic and look for a better deal for all citizens. We need some time and space in Ireland to reflect and respond to find solutions. The good will for Europe is there in Ireland.

Who could have forecast in 1945, when Europe lay in ruins, that in 2008 we would celebrate 50 years of peace? Let that be our inspiration. Europe is a work in progress, a process – difficult, certainly, but always, always worthwhile. That is why we are here. European citizens want a Union that works. So do Irish citizens. Of that I am one hundred percent certain. Let us not disappoint them.

Johannes Voggenhuber (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office, the message I am getting from the governments is that this is an Irish problem. When I talk to citizens, the message I get from them is that this is a European problem, and a conflict with Europe. The governments tell us that it is a diplomatic conflict. The citizens tell us that it is an affront to their sovereignty; they feel that they are being excluded, and they feel deeply aggrieved. The governments tell us that this ‘no’ vote is incomprehensible. When I listen to the citizens, they tell us that it is the Treaty and the process which are incomprehensible. The governments tell us that they have to tackle the real agenda. The citizens tell us that for years, they have been drawing attention to the real agenda, and may I say to the Commission President that they do not mean the military, police and internal security: they mean social responsibility and a European answer to globalisation. They mean more democracy and transparency.

Mr President-in-Office, the governments plan to ask the Irish Government what prompted the ‘no’ vote. Instead, the governments should be asking themselves this: who is really to blame? The governments ignored the writing on the wall after the ‘no’ vote in France and the Netherlands. Have the governments genuinely addressed the real issues? When overhauling the Treaty, did they really respond to disappointed expectations? Were the French not vocal enough in their calls for a new social order, more social responsibility and equity? Were the demands for more democracy simply not clear enough? So what did you do? You just rehashed the Treaty and created an unreadable hotch-potch of footnotes, cross-references and subtext, and you wonder why citizens are rejecting it.

There is one major risk in this affront to sovereignty. It is not only an affront to the Irish people; there is a real risk that this sense of grievance will spread and that Europeans as a whole will say: the Irish people have voted for us! The responsibility for that lies with you, the governments! The time really has come.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Konrad Szymański (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, this is a very tense debate. I would, however, advise caution, great caution when making statements following the Irish referendum. Any suggestion that Ireland should be shamed or even excluded from the Union is far more damaging to Europe than the outcome of the referendum itself. Unfortunately, Mr Schulz, who was, as is his wont, somewhat excited, did make such a suggestion. We should bear in mind that the paternalistic attitude adopted by Brussels caused irritation in Ireland and was one of the reasons why the people of Ireland voted against the Treaty.

It is not true that Europe will suffer without the new Treaty. Europe will suffer as a result of conflicts of interest and because of the Member States’ selfishness. That has nothing to do with Ireland. Europe’s foreign policy will suffer because of Germany, for example. Germany wishes to establish good relations for itself with Russia at the expense of the countries of Central Europe. France is also to blame for turning a blind eye to Russia’s neo-imperialistic policy in the region whilst uttering platitudes about how Europe, Poland included,
is to forge ahead. The Treaty should not be used as a smokescreen for our own failings. The decision taken by the people of Ireland must not be used to conceal our own failings.

(Applause)

Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL). – (GA) Mr President, Irish people have spoken. The vote that Irish people cast against the Treaty of Lisbon last Thursday was not a vote against the EU. Ireland’s place is in the EU. Ireland has obtained social and economic benefits – both north and south – due to its Membership, although some difficulties also exist.

The issue was: Is the Treaty of Lisbon good for the people of Ireland, for the rest of Europe or for the developing world? The Treaty of Lisbon was put before the people in Ireland and it has been rejected. The Treaty of Lisbon is over. Irish citizens, like those in France and the Netherlands previously, want a better deal.

We now have the opportunity to re–open the debate on the future of Europe. We must embrace this opportunity.

It would not be acceptable for EU leaders to seek ways of avoiding or circumventing the democratically expressed wishes of the people. The ratification process must stop, just as it did following the rejection of the EU Constitution. But on this occasion we must listen to the Irish people; we must listen to the people. Many of the same concerns came up in Ireland as were raised previously in France and in the Netherlands. Those concerns must be listened to. We must address those concerns.

Throughout the referendum campaign in Ireland, a number of key issues came up again and again: the democratic deficit, Ireland’s loss of power in Europe, neutrality and non-militarisation, workers’ rights and public services, and the Treaty’s impact on the developing world. These issues must be addressed.

The European project is now put to the democratic test through its response to the vote in Ireland. Does it listen to the people, does it respect their democratic wishes, or does it alienate its citizens by setting all of that aside?

In my view, democracy must prevail. We must listen to what Irish people have said. We must put aside talk of putting them to one side or moving ahead without them, isolating them or blaming them. We need to listen very carefully and calmly to what Irish people have said and to the problems that they have indicated in terms of neutrality and the whole question of EU militarisation, in terms of democracy and the voice of Ireland and other small nations in Europe, in terms of workers’ rights and public services and social Europe.

We need to listen to that. We need to take the opportunity now to speak to the Irish Government, to listen to the Irish people and to chart a way forward and a text that all can be happy with in the future.

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). – Mr President, I came across two major sentiments during the campaign. The first was a general feeling that decision-making was being further removed from the citizens in favour of a distant bureaucracy. The second, possibly more deeply held sentiment was that there was a loss of values. More accurately, that they were changing.

Ireland had prided itself on Christian values but was finding itself becoming a materialistic nation. There has been a great deal of disparagement of my country since Friday. It is as if you feel insulted. What actually happened was that Ireland decisively said ‘no, thank you’ to the Lisbon Treaty.

If the response to the democratic will of the people that I have heard in the last five days is outrage, then there is something wrong. Make no mistake: Ireland is pro-European. We believe, as obviously you do not, that the project has lost its way. It has lost sight of the one thing it needs most – democracy – and forgotten the only people that matter – its citizens.

So, before you try to bypass our democratic decision, ask yourself two questions. One: do you truly believe that this Treaty would survive referendums in the other 26 countries? And two: is threatening a country for being democratic an action of democracy?

(Applause)

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Mr President, the longer we go on the more the European mandarins behave like a breed of political autistics, completely closed off from the real world, from the citizens, whom they nevertheless still claim to serve. Now they are saying that little Ireland does not have the right to oppose a European Treaty, which may soon be ratified by 26 of the 27 Member States. What arrogance! Only Ireland
has said ‘no’ after all, because only Ireland has been given the chance to say ‘no’. Everyone knows that the monster of Lisbon, which arose out of the stillborn European Constitution like a Frankenstein monster, would be massively rejected by the electorates of almost all the other Member States if those electorates were given the chance to vote. In the name of democracy, the result of a democratic election is being booted off the platform and brushed aside. We are well on the way toward the totalitarian Euro-Nazi state.

**Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE).** – (SL) The decision of the Irish people was democratic and we respect it, and there is no need to appeal to us democrats to show respect. There is no doubt about this, yet it is not enough for us to respect it, we must be aware of the consequences and must understand in the Irish and European context why the majority in one of the most successful Member States of the European Union turned against a Treaty which last year, Heads of State – including that of Ireland – or Government signed with the intention of providing an effective joint response to difficult new challenges, be they in relation to the environment, energy, migration or health.

I agree that we need to take time to ponder, but this should not apply to continued ratification. Continued ratification requires no further reflection, and the process needs to be continued. This involves not only Ireland and the entire current European Union, but also the future of Europe, which is not yet entirely united. In this context I congratulate the Slovenian Presidency on all its successes in the approximation of the countries of the Western Balkans, and especially for the stabilisation and association agreements with Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. There we must be happy with every step forward in the spirit of the European perspective and there we need to eradicate all sources of conflict development, something made possible by the European perspective. I recommend that we are tireless.

I hope that the victory of pro-European forces in Macedonia will help the Council towards a decision on the commencement of negotiations with that country, which is already a candidate and has spent a long time in the waiting room. I also hope that the new Macedonian Government, which has been given a strong mandate, will take advantage of this new confidence in a policy that will reinforce developments towards opening negotiations.

**Jo Leinen (PSE).** – (DE) Mr President, what I want from the European Council tomorrow is some clear self-criticism: self-criticism for its abject failure to communicate and inform the people about this new European treaty. It really is staggering that the governments negotiate treaties and even hold elaborate signing ceremonies, and then go back to their capitals and give them no further thought. That is a major cause of the furore that we have experienced in the past and are now facing with Ireland.

(Applause)

I want to see some lessons learned: the Council must finally abandon its blocking tactics and initiate a joint communication or PR strategy with the Commission and Parliament so that we can genuinely take citizens with us on our journey to Europe instead of leaving them by the wayside. At present, these institutions are behaving like parents who bring a child into the world and then dump it in the gutter and forget about it. That is simply unacceptable. We must now take the consequences, and that means forging a common communication and information policy, which is also part of the democratic process. That is the basis for democracy, so that people understand what Europe is about and see that they are part of the process.

I will gladly listen to the messages sent by the people of Ireland, but when Mrs Sinnott tells us, as she did yesterday, that a majority of voters in one town voted against the Treaty of Lisbon because a waste incineration plant is being built there and we have a European law which calls for the incineration of waste, then I really do wonder what this has to do with the Treaty of Lisbon. We have heard many such arguments, and we have to be honest about it: not all of them are relevant and deserve to be considered.

We need to think about a new formula for the ratification of European treaties. Every country must be able to express its views, and I hope that this afternoon, the House of Lords will ratify the Treaty and send out a clear signal that the process is continuing.

**Andrew Duff (ALDE).** – Mr President, this afternoon the British Parliament at Westminster will complete the ratification process for the Lisbon Treaty. It will be refreshing to read the press tomorrow to see finally that Britain says ‘yes’ to Europe. It will do much to restore the moral authority and the political credibility of the UK and it should assist the Irish to find a new consensus based on less libertas and more veritas.

It is bizarre that Mr Farage and his right-wing troops here prefer to let a referendum in a foreign country take a decision on behalf of, and in place of, the British sovereign Parliament. It confirms my opinion that the
plebiscite is a form of democracy, possibly suited for revolutionary circumstances, but completely unsuited for informed and deliberative decisions on complex treaty revision. That is why this Parliament must assist the Council to deliver the content of the Lisbon Treaty.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, the Lisbon Treaty is dead. Without unanimity that is simply a legal fact. Voters, not just in Ireland but in France and the Netherlands too, have said ‘no’ to the Treaty text or its twin brother.

To regain the confidence of our peoples, we must do more than just re-badge and rename the Lisbon text and try to push ahead. The new Treaty was too easy to ridicule and too complex and obscure to explain, making it difficult for ‘yes’ campaigners in any country in a referendum.

Many of the changes which were provided for in this Treaty were good, even necessary, but couched in such obscure, incomprehensible language that hardly anyone could understand.

It is up to the other eight Member States to decide whether and how to continue with ratification, but I think that it would be very helpful if, for example, the UK were to decide to do so by referendum and let us see whether we have the confidence of the people to continue with this process.

Mario Borghezio (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, if the Irish referendum is unimportant and inconsequential, why was it held? Why was it decided to offer this opportunity of a plebiscite, as we have heard?

It is a serious business when a parliament denies the possibility and the importance of allowing people to express themselves with total freedom, as the Irish people have done. This vote is quite simply a fine tombstone, topped by a Celtic cross, for the prospect of a European superstate which our populations so dislike. They dislike the selling-off of political and also monetary sovereignty.

Well, it is a state of affairs which gives hope to those of us who, like the Irish people, firmly believe in a Europe of peoples and regions. For this reason we in Padania likewise call for a referendum, even though in legal terms of course the treaty has now been repudiated, killed off. It has been killed off by this unbelievable procedure of having a treaty that affects the future of our peoples approved by means of a parliamentary vote, excluding the people and citizens.

Fortunately there is one free nation that has a sense of its own freedom in its DNA. Perhaps that strength comes from having had to fight for freedom. It is now time to state the true significance of this vote: it says ‘enough is enough’ to the Brussels Eurocrats who want to build a superstate far removed from the interest and soul of our citizens. We in Padania all feel Irish today.

Vladimír Železný (IND/DEM). – (CS) Mr President, after the Irish referendum, Mr Schulz, the Chairman of the Socialist Group, is scolding us, the citizens of small Member States, in particular Ireland and the Czech Republic, with the typical German haughty arrogance. According to him, when such small countries block the common reform process, we have to ask whether they want to stay in the Union or not. Let me assure you, Mr President (and you can pass this on, Mr Schulz), that now that the Irish have killed this sick product of the German Presidency that is called the Lisbon Treaty, the Czechs will be happy to bury it and still remain a Member State. They will bury it because it contains the Charter and so, for the first time in 60 years, opens the door in our country to the restitution of the Sudetenland property, and to the revision of the just outcome of the Second World War rather than the so-called Beneš Decrees. They will also bury it because it deprives small Member States of their right of veto and increases the German voting power from 9 votes to 18 votes instead. Mr Schulz would do better if he asked himself what the outcome would have been in Germany had the Lisbon Treaty been put to the German people in a referendum. I congratulate the Irish and all of us.

Jana Bobošíková (NI). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, admitting that the Lisbon Treaty is dead and that it was a blind alley is the only democratic and honest solution. Tomorrow, the heads of state should acknowledge at last that in democracies politics is not made over foie gras in air-conditioned halls, and stop trying to manage the lives of other people from Brussels. The Irish referendum clearly shows that people are not willing to suffer decisions from above and the arrogance employed by the Union’s power elite. The Council must make the decision-making process accessible to the public and stop deceiving the citizens. Are we not able to learn from our history? After all the bloody events of the 20th century, does the political elite really want the big countries to make decisions for the smaller ones again? Was it not enough for some prime ministers and presidents to have lived a substantial part of their lives in a totalitarian regime?
Ladies and gentlemen, tomorrow the Council should brush up on the basics: why the Union was created and on what values was it built. It should respect the law and the rules, and immediately declare that further ratification of the now dead Lisbon Treaty is a completely useless exercise.

**Avril Doyle (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, if you are looking to me to make sense of the Irish vote on the Lisbon Treaty, look away: I cannot. But while I am deeply disappointed with the result, of one thing I am sure: we must accept it as the democratic will of the people and respect it.

What a turn-up for the history books, as I look behind me here today to see a motley collection of extreme right-wing British colleagues, including Jim Allister and the odd British jailbird thrown in for good measure, all donning the green jersey, demanding respect for the Irish vote.

*(Protests from certain members of the IND/DEM Group)*

How the history books could have been written differently if respect for the Irish vote from British colleagues was always there! How things could have been different! How many lives could have been saved! I welcome it – albeit very late. We must all respect the Irish vote.

*(Protests in the background)*

He had a lot of time practising behind bars; maybe he could shut up now for a moment...

*(Applause)*

One of the Irish Members in this House, who has already spoken this morning, distributed leaflets during the campaign with a syringe on them. Perhaps she could tell this House where in the Lisbon Treaty euthanasia is provided for, where in the Lisbon Treaty abortion, prostitution, corporate tax decision, risks to the Irish neutrality lie. I await the truth.

The Irish Government must analyse the outcome calmly, to establish exactly what happened within the Treaty text that our electorate voted against, and they must provide answers acceptable not just to naysayers in Ireland but also to all other Member State governments and their citizens who, in my opinion, are also entitled to have their say and express their position, and we must respect that also.

A measured response to the genuine concerns of the Irish electorate is called for, but we must not appease the extremists. When the dust settles, I hope colleagues will agree with me that a two-speed Europe is not the answer but the beginning of the end of our Union, the most successful democratic peace project of our time.

It has always been easier to peddle fear than hope. A famous Irish politician, one of our own – James Dillon – once said: ‘a lie well told and told often enough, I am damned if the truth would ever catch up with it’. It did not. We failed to distinguish fact from fiction in the minds of a sufficient number of our electorate, despite the valiant efforts of our Director of Elections, Gay Mitchell, and my colleagues. It is now up to our new Taoiseach, who has had an inauspicious start, to come up with a solution.

*(Applause)*

**Richard Corbett (PSE).** – Mr President, we must indeed not just listen to the Irish result but reflect and digest it. But, as has been said, we must also listen to the other 26 countries, their results and also concerns that may be expressed during their ratification. And then we must rise to the enormous challenge of bridging the gap.

If we do obtain 26 ratifications and one rejection, it is neither unreasonable nor undemocratic to ask the one whether they could consider the possibility of adjusting the reform package, reviewing it, explaining it better, perhaps seeking a new compromise rather than block all reform. There is nothing unreasonable or undemocratic about that. After all, even some of the ‘no’ campaigners in Ireland professed they claimed their intention was to renegotiate and seek a better agreement.

Some people – and we have heard that from some parts of this House – only want to listen to one side, to the answer that they like, which is the answer ‘no’. I want to listen to both sides and then find a solution acceptable to all 27 countries. That is the challenge we must all rise to.
Marielle De Sarnez (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, it is obviously never a secondary event when people say 'no' when they are asked about the future of Europe, and we cannot, and must not, ignore this 'no'. On the contrary, we have to face it head on and try to respond to it.

As far as I am concerned, there are two questions that we must tackle. The first relates to democracy. The citizens expect Europe to offer legibility, visibility, comprehension, explanations, education, support. This question affects everyone, not just the national governments. It also applies to the European institutions, especially the Commission and the Council. That is the first question.

The second relates to the sense of Europe, its soul, and, as Martin Schulz just mentioned, its raison d'être. Why did we build Europe? That cannot boil down simply to market issues. We did not build Europe for competition alone; we are together for values, we have a project for society, we have a model of society – economic, social, sustainable, human – and that model deserves to be taken up, carried forward and defended. That is what our fellow citizens expect.

The world has changed a great deal since the Treaty of Rome. We must go back to the drawing board and lay new foundations for the European project so that it responds to the crises currently facing us – financial crisis, food crisis, energy crisis – but also responds to the considerable problems we must tackle. How can we create, how can we design growth that is better quality, more sustainable and more just? How can we reduce inequalities? How can we achieve a new global balance? How can we rethink the issue of developing countries and, in particular, their self-sufficiency?

Those are the questions that we need to answer and I think that now more than ever it is at last time for Europe to get back to politics.

Mogens Camre (UEN).– (DA) Mr President, a prominent, popular Danish businessman wrote the following in yesterday's Berlingske Tidende newspaper: 'Europeans fully support international political cooperation and global responsibility. When EU citizens declare their support for democracy at national level, they of course also support democracy in a European context, and that is exactly what they are not getting'. We have been given repeated assurances that the Treaty of Lisbon cannot enter into force if even one country has rejected it, yet what did Mr Pöttering write in his statement of 13 June?

(DE) 'The rejection of the Treaty text by one European Union country cannot mean that the ratifications which have already been carried out by 18 EU countries become invalid.'

(DA) In the age of absolutism, kings and emperors met to agree on the division of power among themselves. Those days have returned. Prince Pöttering, Emperor Barroso and the rulers of their vassal states have decided that Europe's citizens do not matter. Twenty-six countries were not allowed to vote, and the one country that did vote, Ireland, has discovered that it meant nothing. The Union has no popular mandate.

Hanne Dahl (IND/DEM).– (DA) Mr President, last Friday, the Irish voted 'no' to the Treaty of Lisbon, a poor copy of the Constitution to which France and the Netherlands also voted 'no'. Nevertheless, the Commission President says that ratification is to continue. We are told that one country's scepticism cannot put the brakes on development. It is being made to look as though there is a problem with the Irish people. But there is not. The gulf is not between the Irish people and Europe; it is between the people and the Heads of State or Government of Europe. The gulf is not between certain European countries and the rest of Europe. France, the Netherlands and Ireland do not wish to put the brakes on development; they wish for development of a different kind. Why is that so hard to understand? As for Mr Schulz, I would say to him, 'shame on you'. You compare what you call 'anti-Europeans' to fascists, but it is your rhetoric that is fascist. You say that anti-Europeans ran up and down steps, went out canvassing. It does not take much historical awareness to remember what was said about black people in the last century. This is a disgrace! Shame on you!

Andreas Mölzer (NI).– (DE) Mr President, the Irish people have said 'no' to the Treaty, and the EU grandees' response was to infuriate the Irish by summoning the Taoiseach to the European Council in order to give an account of their 'misconduct'. This is childish and unworthy of the founding fathers' European vision. It is even more shortsighted, however, to demand Ireland’s exclusion or attempt to push the Treaty through. If we repeat the vote until the desired outcome is achieved, that really will inflict irreparable damage on Europe's image.

We have held 290 referenda in Europe since 1990, and yet there are no referenda on fundamental decisions of major importance such as Turkey's accession or the introduction of the euro, and now we are not being given a say on something as important as the Lisbon Treaty. Brussels' understanding of what constitutes
Mr President, as Martin Schulz has kindly pointed out, there are indeed many heads of government from the PPE-DE, and that reflects the fact that the PPE-DE is closer to citizens and therefore wins more elections. Nonetheless, the fact of the matter is that there are a number of indications that we need to strike a balance between rational economic policy and social policy.

I fully respect the outcome of the Irish referendum. What I do not respect, however, are the campaigns of lies conducted by certain people on the left and the right in an attempt to mislead the people and set them against this united Europe: a united Europe which is the most successful concept in the history of this continent, one which has achieved peace, freedom and prosperity.

(Applause)

What we must recognise is that this Europe is of particular benefit to the smaller nations. They sit with us around the table, they hold seats in this Parliament, and nothing can be decided in Europe without their say-so, whereas previously, the large nations were able to ride rough-shod over the smaller ones. That is the difference: in our Europe, all the nations are equal, and that is what you are trying to destroy, Mr Farage, with your British imperialist notions!

We need this Treaty so that enlargement can function effectively and so that we can achieve more democracy, by closing the democratic gap and strengthening the national parliaments. We need this Treaty to safeguard the subsidiarity clause and to enable us to master the challenges of the future, from the energy crisis to organised crime, and give us the capacities to respond to food and oil prices and other similar challenges. All this will be destroyed if we do not equip ourselves with the instruments provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon, especially those pertaining to social rights, namely the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the 'social clause', which states that social issues must be taken into account when defining and implementing all policies.

Twenty-six Member States can now ratify the Treaty, and every one has undertaken to do so. It was the United Kingdom which taught me that in a representative democracy, Parliament can speak for the people, and I will not let UKIP destroy what I have learned from the UK. These 26 Member States can ratify the Treaty through a parliamentary process, and if that process is brought to a successful conclusion, the Irish people can then reconsider. We will expect some proposals from Ireland to preserve the cohesion of our Community of 27, because I do not want to see a divided Europe and I do not want to see a core Europe. I want to see a Europe which remains a unity of equals, with 27 countries, and that is why I support the Treaty of Lisbon.

Mr President, I am less diplomatic than most of my colleagues in this House. The fact is that lies, damn lies and statistics defeated the truth in the Irish referendum.

Lisbon is not dead. Nevertheless, the choice made in Ireland is a sovereign decision of the Irish people. The only people who can vary that decision on that Treaty are the Irish people.

Whether that happens or not depends on the discussions that will begin tomorrow between the Irish Government and the other 26 heads of state. There is no magic wand. It will take time to reach conclusions.

I propose a new deadline for ratification of Lisbon. I think that setting it before the European elections is a reasonable target.

If the Irish people continue to be dissatisfied with Lisbon in whatever form it is finally agreed between us and the rest of Europe, then Ireland will have no option but to renegotiate its relationship with the Union.

That would be a disastrous course for our country. Europe has very little to lose if it loses Ireland, but Ireland has everything to lose if it loses Europe.

The global challenges we all face in this constantly changing and inter-connected world are clear: climate change, demographic change, migration and energy crisis, hunger and poverty killing millions, human insecurity, international crime, topped by an identity crisis in virtually every one of our Member States. These cannot be solved by any Member State pulling the shutters down and hoping these will go away.
To conclude, could I urge that Europe demonstrate tangible capacity to deliver decent living and working conditions? That will reinforce our unity and our solidarity and produce a positive solution to this crisis.

(Applause)

**Gunnar Hökmark (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, allow yourself to think: if the Irish had voted ‘yes’, does anyone here believe that our green T-shirts would have had the text ‘Respect the Irish vote’? The truth is that they neither respect the Irish, nor democracy. They only respect a ‘no’, and that is quite unique.

When Sweden entered the European Union, there were 12 Member States. It was 1995. Today there are 27 Member States. That is quite a change, and I think very few can question that Europe has become much, much better because of this enlargement and this magnitude of development. We can say today, when we are discussing the Irish referendum, that those who were saying ‘no’ all the time were wrong all the time, and we who advocated a future development of the European Union have been proved to be right.

So let us proceed in the same way in which we have achieved those results, with persistence, vision, democracy and respect for each Member State. Let us proceed with democracy in each Member State with a ratification process, but also respect the decision of each Member State, while also remembering persistence. We need to go further regarding the energy market, the internal market and how to achieve better results in all areas, but also to understand that the Nice Treaty is not enough if we are to proceed with the same development and the same visions with which we have achieved so much. So let us proceed and let us be the Europe that says ‘yes’. Let us remember that the ‘no’ people have achieved nothing in this Europe.

(Applause)

**Borut Pahor (PSE).** – (SL) This is not a new discussion. We already had a similar discussion when voters in France and the Netherlands rejected the Constitutional Treaty and at that time the Commission and Council assured us that the ratification process would carry on, but then both of them, along with our Parliament, yielded to the temptation to halt that ratification process.

Today, despite our respect for the decision of Irish voters, I would stand in favour of not halting this ratification process now and of seeing it through to the end. I think that in this case it will be easier to find solutions for accepting the Lisbon Treaty than if we once again yield to temptation and halt the process because of one referendum.

Secondly, something needs to be crystal clear to us: there exists a major gulf in the perception of the importance of the European Union between the political elite at home, in national circles, in the European Union and among the majority of our citizens. Here we must ask ourselves whether Parliament, the Council and the European Commission can do anything more to bridge this communication gulf and once again inspire our people with the European idea.

I believe that in welcoming the plans of the Slovenian Presidency for tomorrow’s Council I would propose that it also discusses this – a new communication strategy for dialogue between citizens and the European Union – not just with a view to concluding the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, but also in other respects.

(Applause)

**Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE-DE).** – (ES) Mr President, there has been talk here today of respect and there is no doubt that we have to respect the result of the referendum held in Ireland, in which some people voted ‘yes’ and some people voted ‘no’.

I think we all agree that we must respect the remaining countries and, therefore, continue with ratification. However, I want to talk about respect for democracy and I want to state clearly that approval by the people has the same value as parliamentary approval; exactly the same value. We must remember the first ‘r’: respect.

The second ‘r’ is reflection. We have to look at the reasons that led to the ‘no’ vote in Ireland, we have to endeavour to explain why the Lisbon Treaty is better than the current Treaties and we have to do so with facts and figures.

We have to explain to the people that – like the Irish horse that won the Epsom Derby a few days ago, called New Approach – the Lisbon Treaty is also a ‘new approach’, which Europe needs to offer added value to its people.
After that reflection, the third ‘r’ is resolution. We must find a solution, and in that respect let me completely clear: some of the ‘no’ supporters used a lethal and shameful argument. They said: ‘vote “no” and then we will renegotiate the Lisbon Treaty with advantages for Ireland’.

I want to state clearly here that Europe is a community of rights, where the mood of society reigns and decisions must be respected. We in the European Parliament are stating clearly that there will be no renegotiation of the Lisbon Treaty: Europeans and this Parliament believe that that point is essential for Europe to move forward. Those of us who are in favour of the Treaty want to build on what we have.

My question is: what alternative is put forward by those who want a ‘no’ vote? I would like them to explain it to me.

Bernard Poignant (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, it is now 18 June and as a Frenchman I am consumed with the call from London: resist, continue, persevere and never give up. The word ‘veto’ is written with the same four letters as the word ‘vote’, but there is no veto for the others so we must continue. Having said that, it is the sixth ‘no’ in nine referendums since the fall of the Berlin Wall. That raises questions.

It is said that Europe is not social enough; it will never be social enough. It is not democratic enough; it will remain imperfect. It is too bureaucratic; there will always be technicians who are called technocrats. I think that it is experiencing a terrible identity crisis. Things were simpler before. Today, it is a bit all over the place; it is no longer too sure of its meaning, its history, its destiny, and that is what we need to tackle. To do so we need great leadership and from that point of view we are somewhat on our own.

(Applause)

Stefano Zappalà (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it seems to me that in actual fact – as the President-in-Office and President Barroso have both said – tomorrow’s European Council meeting has a number of items on its agenda, and not just the result of the referendum in Ireland.

Obviously, however, this issue has taken up practically all of this morning’s debate. It is a significant matter. Various reasons have been given and analysed as to why the Irish people responded as they did: in actual fact, by only a narrow margin over the yes vote.

A good deal has been said, but I believe that we must address ourselves in a practical manner to why the Irish response was what it was, and then decide how to proceed. I repeat, a good deal has been said, but I think the answer lies in the fact that Europe’s citizens lack information. Everyone is at fault: we share the blame; the governments are to blame. In general terms it has been said – and I agree – that governments take credit when things go right, but when things go wrong or there are grounds for criticism, Europe is always to blame. That is absolutely true.

Nevertheless, Mr President of the Council, Mr President of the Commission, nobody is forcing anybody to remain in Europe. In my opinion we must respect the outcome of the Irish referendum. We must however equally respect the wishes of the other 26 Member States: 18 at present but soon to be 26. No one should be forced, as it were, to remain inside a cage they do not like. Europe must go forward; Europe cannot stand still.

I am winding up, Mr President. Tomorrow, in my opinion, the European Council must take a clear decision on a new strategy – the heads of state and government can do so – a new strategy whereby those wishing to remain on board may remain on board, but Europe has to move ahead in the general interest.

Gary Titley (PSE). – Mr President, I presume that the leader of the UK Independence Party’s obsession with fraudsters is because of his own party’s intimate relationship with fraud and fraudsters.

To return to the main point of the debate: clearly the Lisbon Treaty cannot come into force on 1 January as we hoped. We have to wait for the Irish Government to tell us how they think we should proceed. But meanwhile other states should exercise their sovereign right to ratify this Treaty. My own Member State will finish its ratification today in accordance with its long-standing and widely respected parliamentary tradition.

Meanwhile globalisation continues apace and with it the insecurity that it generates, which we saw a lot of evidence of in the Irish referendum. The EU is a political process designed to deal with those issues so that is what we should be doing: looking at the Millennium Development Goals, at climate change, at migration. What action? That is why I am going to avoid too much introverted institutional navel-gazing and think about action to improve the lot of our citizens.
I have one question though for the Slovenian presidency: could you tell me what are the implications of the Irish vote for Croatia’s accession to the European Union?

**Jerzy Buzek (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Mr President, we are discussing preparations for the European Council. I do of course consider that all the Members who have taken the floor are right from the point of view of some larger or smaller group of Europeans. We should bear in mind, however, that if this debate had taken place on Wednesday of last week, it would have been quite different. We would certainly not have been debating the problem of the Lisbon Treaty. Instead, we would be discussing the everyday problems of the people of Europe.

As things stand, the citizens of the European Union are not particularly concerned about the rejection of the Treaty by the people of Ireland. They are much more concerned about the price of petrol at filling stations and about other the problems that are arising every day. It would be wrong for our discussions today and the outcome of the summit to focus exclusively on the Lisbon Treaty.

We need to realise that as politicians we are currently being called on to deal with two important issues. One is how to respond to our citizens’ everyday expectations, and the other is the Lisbon Treaty and its implementation. The latter will determine our future capacity to deal with the preoccupations of the people of Europe. We must therefore try to separate these issues and discuss not only the Lisbon Treaty but also issues that are currently of interest to our citizens.

We need to explain to the citizens why adoption of the treaty and its implementation will make it easier to resolve their everyday problems. We need to explain why the institutional solutions we propose are good for the European Union. The proposed arrangements will result in greater solidarity and concern for each other, together with greater respect for what we stand for in each one of our countries.

**Jan Andersson (PSE).** – (SV) I entirely agree that every Member State has the right to have a say. That is a democratic right. I am also of the opinion that, in many respects, the Treaty of Lisbon is better than the current Treaty. That applies to the scope for continued enlargement and to increased openness, but also to employees’ rights.

When I visited Ireland and met trade union representatives during the campaign, there was justified concern that the relationship between the market and social rights is currently not in balance. In Ireland too, there were references to the judgments of the European Court of Justice in the Laval and Rüffert cases. The two most serious consequences are as follows: firstly, equal treatment no longer applies after the judgments. Those who come from Member States with lower pay levels have to be content with the minimum wage and will not get equal pay. Secondly, the right to strike has been restricted in a way which is entirely unacceptable.

The Council and the Commission must get to grips with these issues. It is a question of balance between social Europe and market Europe. If we do not get this balance right, our people will turn their backs on the EU. We all have a responsibility here, all three institutions, and we must act quickly.

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, there is no problem as regards respect for the Irish voters but we should have equal respect for the decisions made by 18 democratically elected national parliaments and, further, show equal respect for the remaining eight Member States, to allow them also freely to decide about the Reform Treaty. With all due respect for the Irish vote, the EU of 27 cannot be taken political hostage by the limited number of opponents to the Lisbon Treaty. There is no alternative to the EU reform. Yes, Europe can stop, but the world around us will not stop because of us, and the most dramatic casualty of this vote will be Europe’s solidarity: our common foreign and security policy and energy solidarity.

There is also an ethical dimension which we need to address. This referendum is a wake-up call for a credible commitment to our principal values. Our citizens may never become fully informed about the details of the Treaties, but they can always be trusted to differentiate between integrity and real commitment on the one hand and half-truths and Realpolitik on the other. Instead of living from one national election to the next, instead of indulging in consumer democracy geared to getting more and more money from Europe, we need leaders who can make the appeal to our citizens: ‘First of all, what can you do for Europe?’ And believe me, if we have such leaders, we will find citizens who will support us.

**Libor Rouček (PSE).** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, six months ago 27 European heads of state or government committed themselves to ratifying the Reform Treaty by attaching their signatures to the document. I want the European Council to be reminded of that at its meeting on Thursday. In particular, I want the Czech
Prime Minister, Mr Mirek Topolánek, to be reminded of the duty to carry out ratification. He, very much like the Czech President, argues that the Lisbon Treaty is dead and that there is no point in continuing with ratification. I would especially like to call on prime ministers who belong to the Group of the European People’s Party, to remind the Czech Prime Minister of his duty and the responsibility facing a country that is due to assume the presidency. As the Czech Republic will take over the EU presidency on 1 January 2009, the final chapter of the ratification process, the solution to the entire Lisbon Treaty problem, will lie precisely on that country’s shoulders. I say again that I would like the European People’s Party to remind the Czech Prime Minister of this duty.

Monica Maria Iacob-Ridzi (PPE-DE). – (RO) The European Council we are preparing today is decisive for the future of Europe. One of the most prosperous European countries and a representative of economic success by implementing the European integration procedures has said “no” to the Lisbon Treaty. At the same time, 18 European countries have adopted this document, most of them being the same 18 that also said “yes” to the European Constitutional Treaty.

I am equally disappointed with the result of the referendum in Ireland, just like many of the previous speakers. Nevertheless, the European Union has to carry on the reforms that are necessary for it. A Europe with several levels of speed, for which there have been procedures even since the Amsterdam Treaty, and with well-defined exclusion options is the only way in which we can go forward at this moment. The chance that Ireland had to evolve has to be provided to the countries that have recently joined the EU as well, such as Romania. In times like these, we have to remember and regroup around the things that unite us and provide us with a reason to go forward.

In his famous speech in favour of the United States of Europe, Sir Winston Churchill said that, if Europe were once united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, prosperity and glory which its people could enjoy. I believe in this vision and, at the same time, I know that great efforts are required for its achievement. Yet, this should not stop us from carrying on.

Othmar Karas (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, we need improvements, not justifications! Nonetheless, the point must be made very clearly that it is the national governments which bear most of the responsibility for the public’s mood towards the EU in our Member States. One thing needs to come out of the EU Summit tomorrow and the day after: an apology from the heads of state and government to the citizens in their Member States for their lack of honesty in relation to Community decisions, for failing to provide the public with adequate information, for failing to communicate with them, and for the lack of courage and integrity about their share of the responsibility for decisions in Europe.

European policy is domestic policy. It must therefore be an integral element of governments’ information and communications policy. Making the European Union the scapegoat for every problem instead of facing up to their responsibility, and then asking citizens, two weeks before a referendum, to give their endorsement is dishonest, irresponsible and disingenuous. Ladies and gentlemen, there is a need for improvement here.

Ioan Mircea Paşcu (PSE). – Mr President, the Irish ‘no’ vote indicates that an unprecedented and successful experiment in world politics, the EU, is in difficulty. But, in order to be truly indicative of the will of the people, any referendum should be preceded by a campaign of information. In the Irish case we can measure that by the degree of correspondence, or total lack of it, between the Lisbon Treaty and the arguments invoked against it.

Of course democracy compels us to take the Irish result into account, which we do. But, equally, democracy cannot be exercised at the expense of the rights of the others, namely those who have already ratified the Lisbon Treaty, and, most important, it cannot be abused to blackmail the majority by a minority.

I am afraid that the Irish ‘no’ will encourage rather than discourage existing tendencies to renationalise some common policies by prolonging the juridical vacuum the EU finds itself in since the rejection of the constitutional treaty.

I would conclude by saying that, as an MEP from a former Communist country which made great efforts to be admitted to the Union, I would hate to see communism living longer than the European Union.

Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, it would appear that all agreements reached in Lisbon are doomed. The Lisbon Strategy and the Lisbon Treaty have both ended in a fiasco. Last week Ireland rejected the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum. This means the document is now dead. The forthcoming summit will have to determine whether there is any hope of reviving the Treaty. The European
Parliament should send out a clear signal that it accepts the rules of democracy even though some Members may be unhappy with the outcome. Insulting and coercing the people of Ireland is unacceptable. One way of exerting acceptable pressure would be to continue the process of ratifying the Treaty in other countries. The extreme and irresponsible comments raising the possibility of excluding such a supposedly arrogant country from the Union are cause for alarm.

We hope that the European Council will consider a new and more democratic formula for the European Union.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, we all know that democracy is not a long calm river, but we also know that it is democracy that we have chosen to organise our society. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, the Irish ‘no’ is no different to the French ‘no’ or the Dutch ‘no’ but, as in 2005, we were unable to explain why Europe is good for our citizens. We were unable to reassure them with regard to the ecological crisis that is hitting them head-on. However, I do not agree with speculation and I believe that we should wait until the end of the ratifications. Nonetheless, I would ask the Council to send a strong signal to the citizens to show that there is a genuine desire for transparency and a desire to reinforce democracy in relation to our fellow citizens. I would ask the Council to open its doors and I would ask that the Commission and Council Presidencies be appointed at the same time as the European elections. Yes, that would be a strong signal and we do not require ratification of the Treaty to make that type of change.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, this is a lively debate and one that I have listened to very carefully. Yes, the Irish have spoken and they have said ‘no’. But one of the things that worries me deeply is that those who voted ‘no’ felt there were no risks in doing so: they felt, perhaps, the status quo would prevail. Now it is very clear from this debate that other countries believe that their process of ratification through parliament is equally valid and that that will proceed.

So there will be some sort of dilemma for Ireland and the Irish to look at the situation if 26 ratify and there is urgency for our Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, to come forward in the next few days with certainly a reflection, and perhaps proposals, on the way forward.

Could I address specifically Kathy Sinnott who campaigned, in my view, with some rather horrendous arguments for a ‘no’ vote? Could I say to her, concerning this worry about loss of values in Ireland, that we cannot blame Europe for the loss of values in Ireland. We have done that ourselves, and let us stop throwing the buck at the European Union and maybe look at our own values of materialism in Ireland and elsewhere.

Genowefa Grabowska (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, I firmly believe that the process of ratification of the Lisbon Treaty should continue. For the countries that signed the document, this is an international legal duty, pursuant to the Vienna Convention on the law of treaties.

The treaty provides an opportunity for essential reforms to the Union. For example, it will make it possible for a common energy policy to be created in Europe. Such a policy is very important for the Union and also for my country, Poland. It would guarantee energy security for all my fellow citizens. I represent Silesia, which has a population of five million. For my region, such a policy would be an opportunity for progress and development, as Silesia is rich in energy resources.

I therefore pose the question: is all this to be thwarted by the Irish ‘no’? I respect the result of the referendum in Ireland, but at the same time I find it hard to accept that the votes of 109 964 Irish people, which represent the difference between the ‘no’ and the ‘yes’ votes, should be able to determine the future of my country, my region and essentially the future of the European Union. I do not think that this should be allowed to happen.

Tobias Pflüger (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to express my thanks to the people of Ireland and also to the CAEUC, which campaigned against the Treaty of Lisbon in Ireland. There have now been three rejections of this Treaty: one in France, one in the Netherlands and now the rejection of a slightly modified version of the Treaty in Ireland. We really do have to accept this at last. I am reminded of Bertolt Brecht, who once said: ‘Would it not be easier in that case for the government to dissolve the people and elect another?’ That is my understanding of a number of statements that have been made here. The substance of the Treaty was indeed debated in Ireland, especially its neoliberal orientation, its focus on militarisation, and above all, its undemocratic character.

We really should just accept this vote. The Treaty is dead and we need a different Treaty. For our part, we will certainly be noting and documenting the various undemocratic statements that have been made here.
Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) The word heard – and read – most frequently in this Chamber today has been ‘respect’. I trust you will permit me to add that we must also respect certain facts, and I would like to highlight the following.

Firstly: ratification of a new treaty on European Union falls within the exclusive competence of the Member States. Exclusive. The Council has absolutely no role in these processes, and the Presidency even less.

Next fact: each Member State carries out this process in accordance with its own rules, which that State formulates in its own independent and sovereign way. This brings us perhaps to the essential point. Certain Member States have carried out parliamentary ratification or will do so, and one is bound by a referendum. Yet this does not mean that there is anything wrong with parliamentary ratification. I firmly reject the assertions of those who believe that parliamentary ratification is imperfect or less democratic than a referendum. This is not true. This is not true. There is absolutely nothing wrong with parliamentary ratification. From the viewpoint of the European Union it is entirely equal to other democratic processes.

Third fact: each Member State speaks for itself. The Irish voters spoke for Ireland. They did not speak for any other Member State. This means that every other Member State has exactly the same right. Eighteen Member States have already ratified the Lisbon Treaty, the others have not yet made a pronouncement, and the view of the Presidency is that ratifications must continue. Those who claim that the Lisbon Treaty is dead, those who are demanding an immediate halt to the ratification process, are denying the right of Member States to speak for themselves, the same right that they are so vehemently defending in the case of Ireland.

Fourth fact: we have already been in this situation and we found a solution. In this case, too, we will find one, based on the reasons why this situation arose, but the Presidency does not wish to speculate on this. The Presidency does not wish to get dragged into a discussion of whether perhaps the Treaty was too complicated, whether there was something wrong with the communication, or whether perhaps, as Mr De Rossa stressed, a great many lies were told. No, we will leave it to our Irish colleagues to analyse the reasons for such an outcome and also to propose their vision of a possible way out. And we will find that way out, of this I am certain. We will find it. And the European Council meeting tomorrow marks the start of our search for the way out.

And the final fact: the item on the agenda for today’s morning sitting was not the result of the Irish referendum, but preparations for the European Council. The Presidency will conduct the discussion in the European Council in this way to make it clear that Europe has not ground to a halt, that Europe continues to function, and for this reason we will be addressing numerous other topics in line with the planned agenda.

We will address the problem of food and oil prices, we will address economic, social and environmental topics, we will address international development challenges and we will address the issue of the Western Balkans. Here I would also like to respond to Mr Titley – there are no direct implications for the European Union’s enlargement policy, which will continue, as will the European Neighbourhood Policy and other policies.

Thank you to everyone, and especially to those who gave their views on these other topics, and I am confident that the European Council will progress successfully.

(Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – Mr President, I should like to thank the honourable Members for all their very interesting contributions. Of course this is the right arena for a debate on democracy and respect for votes.

The Irish voted ‘no’, so why is it then not over? Why does the EU not just say, ‘The Treaty is dead: let us move on’? Why is it that some people and some Member States insist on carrying out their own ratification procedures? Why is it that we insist on coming back to the reasons why we started this whole debate on a new treaty for the European Union?

I hope you will allow me to say a few words about this because, do not forget, the European leaders have invested a lot of political capital in this whole procedure. It has taken a long time and a lot of energy to discuss the underlying issues and the problems behind the need for a new Treaty to design a new machinery for a European Union that has changed so dramatically in a short period of time.

Let me just mention three reasons why we think a new treaty is needed.
Firstly, it would give the Charter of Fundamental Rights legally binding force. Europe is not only about the internal market – as somebody said here – but also about the rights of persons and the rights of workers.

A second reason is, of course, that we would like to be able to speak with one single strong voice in the world, to be stronger on the international scene, and to do that on the basis of our values. We would like to stand up on the international scene, to fight for sustainable development, to discuss oil prices, conflict prevention and other important issues. This is one of the reasons behind the discussion on a new treaty.

The third reason is, of course, to make the European Union more democratic. How ironic it is, for those who talk about respecting the ‘no’ and about the outcome, that the Treaty would actually give more power to the directly elected European Parliament. It would mean more involvement of the national parliaments and would mean that the Council has to hold its deliberations in public, with the Citizens’ Initiative as one of the important elements in a chapter on participatory democracy, which is a new improvement in the Treaty.

The T-shirt party up there have the text ‘Respect the “no”’. My idea of doing that includes knowing the concerns of the Irish people. It is understanding why they voted ‘no’. They have made their own interpretations but I think it is very important that the Irish Government, with the help of our Eurobarometer opinion polls, can better understand what the concerns are and whether we can do something about them.

Is that not the idea of democracy? That is the way forward – to understand their arguments, to work with the other Member States and also to get their respect for the problems that we can, hopefully, solve together. As we did after the ‘no’ vote in the French and Dutch referendums, we have already carried out a Eurobarometer survey, which I think will also help better to understand the challenges of any referendum. Carrying out a referendum has its upsides but also its downsides – or rather, from a democratic point of view, challenges. After the voters have been presented with such a complex wide text as a new international treaty, of course there is room for different interpretations of the results.

We need to understand better what the Irish said, what they are afraid of and what they hope for. I already understand from the preliminary results that this is not a general ‘no’ to Europe. It is also understanding and respecting their role in a European Union.

The upside of carrying out a referendum is that you also have to inform and communicate with citizens, with all the challenges that implies. I think that everybody can see that we also have to analyse what we can improve in terms of communication and information to citizens. I have always said that communication is a tool for democracy. This must be based on a right for citizens to know what goes on at European level, what is decided and how citizens can have a say. That work has to be further intensified and that is why also the Commission will continue with what we started a couple of years ago, called Plan ‘D’, as in Debate, Dialogue and Democracy. That will be based on the idea of having a citizens’ ownership of EU policies...

**President.** Madam Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I realise that there is a bit of a hubbub because a lot of colleagues are entering the chamber, but I would ask those entering not to stand chatting because many colleagues are keen to hear the Commissioner’s conclusions.

**Margot Wallström,** Vice-President of the Commission. – Mr President, I am trying to summarise that we need to create a citizen’s ownership of EU policies, to make them understandable and relevant, and to make the EU institutions accountable and reliable to those they serve.

We need to have a broad and permanent debate on the future of the European Union between the democratic institutions in the EU and the citizens, both at national and EU level, and we need to empower citizens by giving them access to information so that they can have an informed debate on the European Union. We have already proposed creating a framework for that, as Jo Leinen has already pointed to – and thank you for doing so. I thank Mr Lenarčič for trying to find a solution to that.

I thank Parliament for its support in trying to be more effective in communicating with citizens, because then we have to be serious about it and give it the resources and the framework we need to work in partnership with Member States as well and, of course, to make our texts and our decisions as readable as possible.

We had a debate on the consolidated Treaty. It took the Council too long to accept and to publish a consolidated Treaty, but in the end it did so, and this is, of course, one tool with which we are able to reach out in a better way to our citizens.

We have to continue to draw conclusions and learn the lessons also from the Irish example, but to respect the ‘no’ vote. We do that best by actually knowing what were their concerns, by finding the solutions together...
and allowing the other Member States also to have their say. I hope that this debate will also serve as an input
to the leaders’ meeting tomorrow and on Friday. I thank you very much for a good and constructive debate.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you, Commissioner.

The debate is closed.

I wish to inform the House that Mr Hans-Peter Martin has asked to make a personal statement under Rule 145
of the Rules of Procedure. As provided for in Rule 145, I shall give Mr Martin the floor when the minutes of
this sitting are considered for approval.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Jim Allister (NI), in writing. – I heartily congratulate the voters of the Republic of Ireland on convincingly
rejecting the repackaged Constitution. In so doing they struck a blow for millions of democrats across Europe,
who were denied a say by the totalitarian attempt of the EU elite to foist the Lisbon Treaty on us all. The
challenge is now whether some elite have the honesty and integrity to admit that the Treaty is dead. Lisbon
sets its own test for survival: unanimous ratification. It spectacularly failed that test. Like its predecessor, the
Constitution, it foundered on the rock of democracy. Rather than face reality, I fear that we will again face
a Brussels conspiracy to circumvent the people. If you do, you will ultimately face the same fate. So save
yourselves the trouble and admit that the Treaty is dead, with no prospect of resurrection.

Costas Botopoulos (PSE), in writing. – In these times of crisis and institutional uncertainty I feel I must
praise the Treaty of Lisbon. I do not know if it will ever enter into force, but if one wanted to avoid populism
he should say that it is a good treaty. Of course it was not as democratically constructed and discussed as the
Constitutional Treaty. Of course it is not the perfect text – there is no perfect text. Of course it is too complex
– but which European Treaty is not? People who say they do not understand it in fact show they have no
confidence in their leaders. But it is a text that advances democracy in Europe. It would make Europe more
open, efficient and socially sensitive. One simple example: were it in force, were the Charter of Fundamental
Rights in force, the Court of Justice could not have taken the Viking and Laval decisions, which are so
detrimental for workers. So we need more Europe, not less. More democracy. More politics. As socialists,
we now have the duty to go before the people and explain what kind of new and different Europe we want.

Alexandra Dobolyi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) I am one of those people who think that things in Europe will
no longer be the same as they were before the Irish ‘no’ vote. One thing we certainly cannot do is to ignore
the outcome of the Irish referendum. I am also one of those people, however, who believe that we must
continue with the ratification process; every Member State has the same right to express its opinion on the
common future of Europe.

We need to solve this complicated puzzle on the one hand by listening to the voice of the Irish citizens, and
on the other by giving due consideration to the position of all the other Member States that want to move
ahead along the common European road.

The equation is a difficult one, and we need to grasp every opportunity for evaluation. For this, we need all
27 Member States. I believe that the 27 Member States must find a common solution and make a common
decision regarding the next step.

As Commissioner Barroso said, ‘27 Member States signed the Treaty; we must make every effort to make
sure that 27 Member States find a way forward’. We must find a solution, a way to break the deadlock.

Titus Corlăţean (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The European process needs to continue.

The vote of the Irish citizens for the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty must be respected.

At the same time, we need to take into consideration the larger interests of all the European Union citizens
in making the European structure more efficient, as well as in continuing the process of the Union enlargement.

The Irish citizens don’t have only rights, but they also have obligations in the EU. They need to be aware of
the consequences they undertake by rejecting the Lisbon Treaty.

The Irish citizens will have to decide by a new referendum whether they leave the European Union or they
stay in the EU based on the Lisbon Treaty.
The stoppage of the European process by invoking the “intact sovereignty” of the Irish actually means the stoppage of the natural aspirations of the citizens from Croatia, the Republic of Moldova etc. to approach the EU.

Just like Ireland and the Irish political representatives have the right to fight for the aspirations of their citizens, Romania is entitled to fight for the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Following the victorious NO vote in the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, the leaders of the European Union should have recognised what was obvious: that the Lisbon Treaty has failed. They know that it only takes one Member State not to ratify a treaty for this to be prevented from entering into force. Those are the rules. It should also be noted that this rejection follows on from two other identical results in France and the Netherlands on the so-called European Constitution, which was the forerunner of the Lisbon Treaty.

However, the only recognition made by the President of the European Commission has been that it will take time and effort to solve the problem created by the Irish referendum. He is trying to lay the blame at Ireland’s door and is failing to recognise that the problem stems from the deep crisis of legitimacy of the neoliberal, militarist and federalist policies which are being pursued.

The European Council must therefore this week answer a fundamental question: whether to abandon the process of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty due to this being dead in the water, or to launch a debate on the real reasons for people’s discontent and make the necessary political changes in order to tackle the current crises, in other words promote greater social justice and more security in employment with rights, combat speculative profits and prices, and give priority to the fight for social inclusion.

Petru Filip (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The recent vote of the Irish was interpreted in various manners in the European Community and the speeches in the Parliament confirm the difficulties that this vote might produce.

I would like to refer briefly to the problems that the vote of the Irish citizens might cause in the public opinion of the countries recently integrated into the EU, especially the Eastern European countries. The citizens of these countries will have great difficulties in understanding the binding nature of taking over those European norms involving economic sacrifices into the national framework, as well as a series of public policies that citizens consider much too restrictive for the economic stage in which these countries are now.

What I would like to emphasize here is that any attempt to introduce exceptional treatments in the Community framework will be certainly reflected in the 2009 political vote, which might provide reasons for the radicalization of an electorate that voted very enthusiastically in favour of these countries’ accession to the EU.

Gyula Hegyi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) There are many ways of interpreting the Irish referendum. It is a victory for popular sovereignty: we cannot deny this simple fact. At the same time, however, a majority of the voters did not know what they were voting for, as was indicated by the fact that supporters of the ‘no’ campaign referred to historical grievances that have actually been resolved by European Union membership. We may consider it an injustice that 53% of the voters in a relatively small country have the power to obstruct twenty-six other nations from deepening their cooperation and fulfilling the European dream. One thing is certain, however, and that is that in future we must discuss integration with the citizens of the European Union in a more intelligent, persuasive and readily comprehensible manner. For this reason, the European Parliament’s Committee on Culture and Education is initiating a report with the working title ‘Active dialogue with citizens on Europe’. I have been asked to prepare this report. I ask my fellow Members to support our work by sharing their ideas; let us gather our thoughts, so that not only will we come to understand and to love the issue of integration and cooperation, but we will ensure that Europe’s citizens grow to understand and to love it too.

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN), in writing. – (PL) We are today debating the future of the European Union. We are doing so in the wake of the emotions raised by the outcome of the referendum in Ireland. I appeal to all concerned, Members of the European Parliament and representatives of the Commission and of the Council, to refrain from lecturing the people of Ireland and threatening them with a range of reprisals including exclusion from the Union. The facts are that the Union exists and the vote by the Irish nation is not a vote against the Union. In my view, it is an expression of opposition to the document entitled the Lisbon Reform Treaty. The Irish people rejected the particular version of reform presented to them.
It is highly likely that if the same question had been put to the citizens of other countries in a referendum, they would have given exactly the same answer. After all, the Treaty is incomprehensible even to an educated citizen of the European Union. We would do well to consider whether this is not a novel signal indicating that the so-called elite should try to bridge the considerable gap that currently exists between citizens of the Member States and the leaders of political groupings at both national and Union level.

The relevant provisions of international law actually state that if even one of the states parties to the agreement does not accept the international agreement then the agreement is not binding in that form. That is clear, regardless of our views on the document as a whole. The people of Ireland chose freely. We must respect their decision and seek positive solutions for the future of Europe. As the saying goes, *vox populi, vox dei.*

**Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE), in writing.** — (FI) Crisis! Crisis! Again people are shouting about the EU being in crisis, because the Irish rejected the Treaty of Lisbon in their referendum on Thursday 12 June. The Treaty can only enter into force if it is ratified by all the Member States. The EU leaders are calling for new solutions, but few have any to offer.

There are at least two problems. The Treaty of Lisbon is so obscure that it is almost impossible to understand. Would you be ready to sign it? What is more, the EU elite obviously want to move forward too fast.

Now it is time for the small Member States to act. They should insist on every Member State having its own Commissioner. That originally was the wish of Finland and many other countries.

The Treaty of Lisbon, if it took effect, would lead to a situation where each Member States would be without a Commissioner for a third of the time in turn as from 2014. The wording of the Treaty is so vague that in practice the small Member States would apparently be without a Commissioner for longer than the big ones. Ireland is thought by some to have rejected the Treaty partly on account of the Commissioner issue.

Finland’s Commissioner is of special importance for small Member States, even though it is the duty of Commissioners to promote the interests of the EU as a whole. In Finland every region rejoices if it has its ‘own’ minister in the Cabinet.

EU leaders now need to think carefully about what is the source of the public’s growing distrust of the EU. Has the Union acted in the interests of all its citizens in the best possible way? Has it increased cooperation in different areas and expanded too fast?

**Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing.** — (PL) The decision by the people of Ireland has put Europe in a difficult situation. The referendum also served to emphasise just how much concern we should devote to our great European project to create a Europe characterised by peace and solidarity, whose main preoccupation is the good of its citizens and playing a strong role on the global economic and political stage. We now have proof of the heavy price to be paid if we neglect to engage in dialogue with our societies to explain what integration is all about.

The process of ratification should continue, and I am confident that Ireland will make every effort to resolve the situation. I agree with the view expressed by Mr Schulz, the leader of the Socialist Group in the European
Parliament, that the way in which the European Commission and the European Council operate is one of the underlying reasons for the current state of affairs. Increasing the competences of the European Parliament as a democratic institution could make a greater contribution to streamlining the Union than major declarations and programmes, as the latter fail to reach the citizens’ hearts and minds.

Marianne Mikko (PSE), in writing. – (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, Dublin’s ‘no’ to the Lisbon Treaty was a surprise because it was with EU support that Ireland has built up a competitive economy, stabilised the labour market and created a welfare society. It would have been possible for the Irish to vote for a stronger, more competitive European Union, one that served the Member States’ interests more than before.

Personally I take the view that putting the Lisbon Treaty to a referendum appeared to be democratic, but deceptively so. Internal problems, in which the EU does not intervene, inevitably created tensions which needed to be vented. Therefore it is easy to create an apparent opportunity to express one’s dissatisfaction without regard to the means. Also indicative of the sham democracy and the tensions being expressed were the opinion polls conducted before the referendum, from which it emerged that the people who voted ‘no’ did not know the actual content, or much about the significance, of the Lisbon Treaty.

It is up to Irish politicians to answer the question ‘why?’ Ireland has consistently been one of the most successful users of EU subsidies. The Irish are known for their pro-European attitude. All the more ironic, then, that because of Ireland we will have to put a stop to the creation of a stronger common future.

Estonia ratified the Lisbon Treaty a day before the Irish referendum. This means that, unlike Dublin, Tallinn has helped to build a common future. I am a firm supporter of the ratification process, and I believe that Ireland will make a new attempt to assure the 500 million citizens of Europe and they too bear the name of Europeans with honour. Dublin’s debt of gratitude to Europe is obvious.

Toomas Savi (ALDE), in writing. – Mr President, although the result of the Irish referendum was a great disappointment to the European Union, it is not the proper time to panic and look for a scapegoat. The European Council is about to hold its meeting on June 19 and 20 in Brussels. We should first take time to hear the explanations of Taoiseach Brian Cowen and listen to his proposals on how to go on with Ireland.

In my opinion the remaining eight Member States must go on with the ratification as scheduled, despite the Irish “no”.

The Treaty of Lisbon is indispensable for the successful continuation of the European project. It would be unthinkable to restart new negotiations, as the European Union has occupied itself with negotiations on its future for the past nine years. The Treaty of Lisbon creates a more understandable, democratic and efficient European Union and we cannot quit on that just yet.

Esko Seppänen (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (FI) Democracy literally means the power of the people. There cannot be democracy without the people and it is not good for the people to be without democracy. In Ireland the people were able to vote on the new constitution, the Treaty of Lisbon. That was democracy, and the Irish voted no on behalf of all the other nations. It accounted for 53.4% of the votes, with 46.6% voting yes. In Ireland they did not want the EU moving in the direction of a federation, or becoming militarised, or a further shift of power towards the big countries.

The federation idea is promoted by men and women who are poor democrats and poor losers. They have begun to revive the body by force. They say that the small countries are not needed if they will not comply with the very real authority of the big ones. This way they perpetrate the misconception of EU democracy.

The Irish are denounced for the way they exercised their powers but no one is laughing at the Hungarians, although the parliament there voted yes even before the unreadable treaty had been submitted to it. The decision of the Irish people is democracy, but that of the Hungarian Parliament is not.

The desire to have a constitution for the EU does not come from the needs of the people but from the will to shore up the power of the elite. Without referendums it will be a coup – in both the small and the big countries.

Adrian Severin (PSE), in writing. – While we keep behind our closed doors states like Croatia, Turkey, Ukraine and Moldova, which are struggling to become members, we strive to keep in states which are unsure that it is worthwhile to be members of a strong union. It is unfair, unproductive and unsustainable to treat the eurosceptics better than the euro-enthusiasts.
Equal respect for all nations means confronting each one with its own responsibility. Trying to cheat and tempt someone with illusory protocols and concessions in order to change decisions without changing convictions would be an offence and a lack of democratic respect.

The Irish people should take as much time as necessary in order to reflect on its European future. Perhaps the best frame for such a democratic reflection would be early elections. Anyhow, the Irish must use their own time and not the others’ time. Therefore an interim status for Ireland within the EU, letting the European integration progress with fewer states involved, must be considered.

Eventually, through a new referendum, the Irish people should answer the question of whether they want to stay in the European Union on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty or if they want to play a ‘chevalier role’ in the storms of the global order.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) The rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the people of Ireland has stifled any hope of swift institutional reform of the European Union. It is the second such wasted opportunity. The work was halted in the past by the negative outcome of the earlier French and Dutch referenda.

In my view, the people of Ireland are certainly not to blame for what has happened. The fact that they voted against the Treaty does not mean that they are negatively disposed towards the European Union as a whole. The Treaty was rejected in Ireland because of the inappropriate way that the European institutions and the governments of the Member States handled the question of Treaty ratification and the citizens’ involvement in the process. I suspect that if a referendum had been carried out in all the Member States, Ireland would not have been the only one to say ‘no’.

Such a reaction to the Treaty by the citizens is due to disinformation rather than to ill-will.

The action the Union should now take regarding the fate of the Lisbon Treaty should be similar to that taken after the Constitutional Treaty was rejected by the Netherlands and France.

Fortunately, the Union is still able to function effectively on the basis of the Treaty of Nice and of the other treaties still in force. This means that we can take time to consider carefully how to correct the mistakes made.

Marek Siwiec (PSE), in writing. – (PL) In view of the decision by the people of Ireland, as expressed in the latest referendum, it is even more important for Poland to finalise ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. If the President of Poland brings the process to a standstill on the basis of the argument concerning final signature, he will thereby align our country with those who are against the Treaty, in opposition to the overwhelming majority of countries who have accepted it.

That would not be to our advantage. We have in the past resorted to threats, some would even say to blackmail, but we did agree to a compromise. We must abide by the consequences of the latter, especially following the outcome of the Irish referendum. Poland actually has the opportunity to play its part in a key action aimed at creating a strong Europe. Swift ratification of the Treaty will not be a routine step, but a significant political gesture.

I believe it can be taken for granted that sooner or later, with Ireland or without it, the substance of the Treaty will be implemented. It is therefore important for us to be on the right side at the right time.

Theodor Dumitru Stolojan (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The European Parliament and the other European institutions must respect the vote made by the Irish people at the referendum. I am telling it very clearly: the Irish citizens did not vote against the European Union, but against the Lisbon Treaty. We have clear signals that the content and grounds of this Treaty have not been understood, and the fears of the Irish people regarding the taxation system and the preservation of neutrality have been increased by certain political parties.

The European Parliament has to send a clear signal of support for the ratification process in the other Member States. At the same time, we have to present viable solutions to the Irish citizens and the Irish government for overcoming this impasse. In the end, the Lisbon Treaty is the necessary step forward for the European institutions system to operate more efficiently, under the ever more difficult global conditions to which every Member State has to respond: economic competitiveness, climate change, price increases for natural resources and many other aspects that affect us all.
Daniel Strož (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (CS) The Lisbon Treaty has become a dead document, just as when the French and the Dutch rejected the EU draft Constitution. Although the President of the European Parliament, Mr Pöttering, declared that the aim of the Treaty was to achieve greater democracy, greater political effectiveness and greater clarity and transparency, and that the ratification process must continue in those Member States that have not yet ratified it, these are just meaningless phrases.

Had referenda taken place in countries other than Ireland, the Irish ‘no’ would surely not have been the only one. Take the trickery employed by the ‘European elite’ who presented nothing more than the dusted and amended EU draft Constitution for ratification! In addition to the Irish, the French and the Dutch would say ‘no’ again; after all, public opinion surveys carried out in these countries indicate as much. Those who ‘steer’ EU policy should realise, at long last, that the majority of citizens reject the Union as a militarist and neo-liberal project that is effectively antisocial!

The result of the Irish referendum is not a disaster for Europe, as some people would have us believe. It is a chance to start a new discussion process in which, at last, ordinary citizens should also be widely involved. After all, the Irish did not vote against the European Union. They voted against the contents of the Lisbon Treaty that would ruin the social standards achieved to date, and turn the Union into a militarist conglomerate. The so-called European idea is not thrown into jeopardy by those who reject the Lisbon Treaty. It is thrown into jeopardy by those who are now shouting ‘let us go on’ or considering introducing a ‘two-speed’ Europe.

Margie Sudre (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) From tomorrow the European Council will be required to draw the conclusions from the result of the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. It is up to Ireland, through its Taoiseach, to provide an analysis of this vote and to reiterate its desire to see European integration move forward.

I hope that the EU27 agree to continue with the ratification process in the Member States that have not yet taken a decision so that we will eventually know each country’s exact position on this text.

The Slovenian and then the French Presidencies must work with Ireland to try to find a legally acceptable solution that would put an end once and for all to more than 15 years of efforts to reform the workings of the enlarged Europe.

The responsibilities of the French Presidency will surely increase given that the European context is disrupted and the global markets in raw material foodstuffs and fuels are shooting up.

The people of Europe are unsure. The European Council must show them that Europe is helping to meet their expectations by reaching decisions on the fundamental issues. Although that may not resolve the institutional question immediately, it is nevertheless the best way of showing the Irish that they have been heard.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) The Lisbon Treaty has been rejected by the very country that up to now has set an example of how to make full use of the benefits of European integration. The deep crisis of confidence in politics also illustrates this. Poor communication in terms of demonstrating the benefits of the Lisbon Treaty also played a major part in this failure. Ireland did not decide on the Treaty; the outcome of the referendum was determined by domestic policy issues. The referendum as an institution has proven to be an unsuitable instrument for deciding complex issues such as this. The Lisbon Treaty is not just about institutional reform in the European Union; the Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights make Europe a genuine political community and a community of values. This is a new level in the development of European integration in qualitative terms.

The Irish referendum is a major problem, but it depends on us whether the European Union falls back into crisis this time or responds rapidly and decisively. In the present situation the biggest mistake would be to renegotiate the deal that took so much effort to achieve, and therefore we should keep the Lisbon Treaty as it stands. Nearly two thirds of the Member States have adopted the Treaty, including Hungary, the first country to do so. The ratification process must continue. Ireland must decide as soon as possible, whether it wants to continue to be a part of deepening integration; one country cannot stand in the way of another 26 that want to move forward.

I have every confidence that the European Council meeting that begins tomorrow will find a way out of this situation. The work of building Europe must continue, and to do that we need the Lisbon Treaty.
Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The European Union needs a new institutional framework after the Treaty of Nice, and the Lisbon Treaty, although less ambitious than the European Constitution, is a good text.

18 Member States have ratified the Lisbon Treaty in their national parliaments. Ireland decided the ratification by referendum, and the Irish citizens rejected the Treaty. In 2001, Ireland voted against the Treaty of Nice as well and, one year later, it ratified it.

The vote of the Irish people shows that this country’s population considers the Community institutional construction a complicated one. It is our duty to explain to the European citizens the need for and the provisions of this treaty. This Treaty deals with the issue of climate change, defines the European economy as a social market economy, emphasizes the need for a common energy policy and, in particular, gives legal value to the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. The Reform Treaty enhances the level of democracy by increasing the power of the European Parliament and allows half of the national parliaments to reject a legislative project if it is deemed that it infringes the principle of subsidiary.

The vote of the Irish people shows us that we need responsibility and more dialogue, that we need to explain more and better the provisions of this new treaty to the European citizens, as well as the reasons why it is necessary.

Witold Tomczak (IND/DEM), in writing. – (PL) The European nations that long for freedom and sovereignty now have reason to thank the Irish nation. A message of freedom and hope has gone out, loud and clear, from little Ireland. That message should be a wake-up call for the enemies of democracy who disregard the will of the people and break the previously agreed rules of the game.

The question of what to do next has arisen. I submit that instead of dreaming about an unattainable European superstate, we should launch a debate on the rights of the nations. We should first agree on a charter concerning the rights of the nations, and use that as a basis for defining the principles of European integration.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are the architects of the European Union. I urge you to stop the manipulation, and to allow the people themselves to determine their future by putting them in possession of the truth. I call on you to allow the nations to live in their sovereign states, which will decide for themselves how and with whom to cooperate and how and with whom to integrate.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The Irish people’s resounding ‘no’ vote has made the Lisbon Treaty unenforceable.

This represents a significant defeat for the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament, and also for the centre-right and centre-left governments in the EU Member States (New Democracy (ND) and PASOK in Greece). It is a setback for the representatives of capitalism in general, who played a leading role in quashing the vote of the peoples of the Netherlands and France against the EU Constitution, and in suppressing the growing movement within the EU to challenge and reject the Treaty of Lisbon.

These same political forces are those constituting the great alliance in the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament: the Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance and other supporters of the European ‘monolith’, with the participation of the New Democracy and PASOK MEPs. In Parliament’s plenary sitting on 20 February 2008 they all voted against the proposal to respect the verdict of the Irish people and against holding referendums on the Lisbon Treaty in the Member States.

The heavy-handed policy of the Council and the European Commission in pursuing the ratification process for the Lisbon Treaty is an autocratic act of contempt for the will of the Irish people and the peoples generally.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA
Vice-President

3. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

(For the results and other details of the vote: see Minutes)
3.1. Approval of the new allocation of the responsibilities of Vice-President of the Commission Jacques Barrot (vote)

3.2. Approval of the appointment of Antonio Tajani as member of the European Commission (vote)

3.3. Missing persons in Cyprus - Follow-up (A6-0139/2008, Ewa Klamt) (vote)

3.4. Common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (A6-0339/2007, Manfred Weber) (vote)

- After the vote on Amendment 74:

Konrad Szymański (UEN). – (PL) I should like to draw your attention to the fact that some Members on the left of the Chamber are displaying banners. We were informed this morning that holding up banners on the right of the Chamber contravened our procedures.

President. – In principle, anything that does not directly disrupt our work does not have to be banned, but if the House thinks that these placards are disrupting the work… Well, I do not think that there is a majority that considers itself to be disrupted. We shall therefore continue.

4. Welcome

President. – As President, I would today like to welcome 10 members of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly, led by its Speaker, Mr Wani Igga, who have travelled all the way to Strasbourg to visit the European Parliament.

(Applause)

The Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly, in which they sit, was set up as a result of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005 after a long and brutal civil war. The Assembly plays a crucial role in monitoring the implementation of legislation and implementation of the Peace Agreement. On behalf of the European Parliament, I wish to say that we support your Assembly, which has to cope with the challenges currently facing Sudan, especially with the prospect of the elections scheduled for next year. We hope that your visit will help you to find a peaceful solution to the Sudan conflict and that it will stimulate political dialogue between the European Parliament and your Assembly on the reconstruction process following the conflict in your country. I therefore welcome you to the European Parliament.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU
Vice-President


President. – Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the President of the European Parliament, I have the great honour and pleasure, in this European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, of welcoming to the European Parliament the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Dr Asma Jahangir.

Our Parliament attaches particular importance to this Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Through a series of events and initiatives, our Parliament provides a forum for the exchange of ideas between citizens from different cultures and communities, and between citizens of different religions and beliefs.

In the course of this year, we have already invited politicians and religious leaders from around the world to address us. We hope that our Parliament will also serve as a forum for communication, the spreading of a common message and the promotion of genuine free dialogue and better mutual acquaintance.

It is my particular pleasure to welcome you, Dr Jahangir, to address the plenary on issues of vital importance to world peace and development.
As part of our common mission to promote democracy and human rights, we have been closely watching events in your country, Pakistan, and during your detention last year, the European Parliament passed a resolution calling for your immediate release. For this reason above all, we are particularly glad to have you with us today.

There is another reason why your visit is especially significant at this time. This year we are celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. This Declaration heralded a new era in a world that had just survived the tribulations of the worst war in history, a war that began in Europe. The Declaration laid down the first international, formal obligation regarding the dignity and equality of all human beings, regardless of colour, belief or origin. Article 18 of the Declaration states that ‘Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.’

Your task as Special UN Rapporteur is to identify existing barriers or possible future barriers to the exercise of this right, and to propose methods and measures to counteract and overcome them.

In your reports, you emphasise the importance of ongoing, intensified dialogue with communities that adhere to different religions or beliefs. This is a dialogue that must be held at all levels, by all social groups. In particular, you emphasise the need for widespread participation by women in promoting greater tolerance, respect and mutual understanding.

In many of its resolutions, the European Parliament has highlighted the fact that women play a vital role in promoting dialogue and peace, as was also underlined at the conference that we organised on the occasion of International Women’s Day. You yourself have participated in many conferences on the promotion of dialogue, for example in the context of the Alliance of Civilizations, and have taken many initiatives to give women a greater role.

You have also stressed the role of education as the most important factor in preventing conflict. Education can teach respect and the acceptance of pluralism and diversity in the context of religion and beliefs. It thus contributes to the dissemination and enforcement of human rights in all societies.

What you are advocating is in line with the motto of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, ‘Together in Diversity’. It complements the leading role assigned to activities promoting knowledge, respect, and tolerance of different beliefs.

Today’s meeting is a grand occasion. For those wishing to continue the discussion with you, there will be a special meeting tomorrow morning, organised by the Subcommittee on Human Rights.

Dr Jahangir, I have great pleasure in inviting you now to address the European Parliament.

(applause)

Asma Jahangir, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. ~ Madam President, distinguished Members of the European Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, it is a great honour and an immense pleasure to be here with you today. I would like to very warmly thank the President, Hans-Gert Pöttering, for having invited me to address the European Parliament. I must also thank you for the support that you have given me, both as a UN Special Rapporteur and, personally, when I was a prisoner last year.

Your decision to designate 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and develop various related initiatives is indeed timely and very important. The history of Europe has been shaped by many positive instances of intercultural dialogue. However, a lack of such constructive dialogue is also noticeable, for example when we remind ourselves of the religious wars or the ghettoisation of certain believers in the Middle Ages.

In my speech I would like to share with you some thoughts, mainly on interreligious dialogue, based on the experience I have gained in the past four years as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. I would like to raise four questions, basically with regard to the what, why, who and how of intercultural dialogue.

Let us start with the first question: what do we mean by intercultural dialogue? Already the terminology seems to be tricky: does ‘intercultural’ also include ‘interreligious’ dialogue? Of course, I would answer this question in the affirmative, since religions are part of culture. At the same time, ‘intra-religious’ tensions also
need to be adequately addressed. Consequently, intercultural dialogue should also take the believers of different denominations of the various religions on board and their ideas into account.

What about dialogue between theistic, non-theistic and atheistic believers? All of these believers are protected under international human rights law, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. So, in my opinion, these dimensions should also be included in initiatives of intercultural dialogue.

At the level of the United Nations there are further terms, such as the Alliance of Civilizations or 'International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures 2010'. These titles avoid the often contentious word ‘religion’, but they are very much designed to foster interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace.

So ‘intercultural dialogue’ could be seen as a comprehensive term, including the various dimensions mentioned earlier on: interreligious dialogue and intra-religious approaches, also when they involve atheistic non-believers. I very much like the way the European Parliament and the Council have described the goals of intercultural dialogue in their decision No 1983/2006/EC, which established the European Year ‘to strengthen respect for cultural diversity and deal with the complex reality in our societies and the coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the contribution of different cultures to the Member States’ heritage and way of life and to recognise that culture and intercultural dialogue are essential for learning to live together in harmony.’

More importantly, the state must abide by policies and develop its governance skills to include diverse interests. Both government and civil society have a role in creating an environment where people of various religions and beliefs can effortlessly interact. As such, the concept of intercultural dialogue must be broadened.

This leads me to the second question: why is intercultural dialogue important? I am convinced that maintaining an intercultural dialogue is of the utmost importance in order to overcome sectarian and intransigent attitudes and to enhance religious tolerance all over the world. Apart from education, interreligious dialogue constitutes one of the principal means of preventing misunderstandings, conflicts and violations in the area of freedom of religion or belief. If conducted successfully, intercultural dialogue can indeed promote tolerance, respect and understanding.

Although cultures and religions may be quite different, there is no justification for saying that, because they are different, they do not have equal status. While a vast number of people, regardless of their religion or belief, adhere to universal values, there have always been individuals who try to prove that their culture, their religion, their language or their history is superior to that of their neighbours. My predecessor as United Nations Special Rapporteur, Professor Abdelfattah Amor from Tunisia, has already asked if there is anything that people have not done throughout history ‘in the name of religion’. Nevertheless, religions share many moral values which could and should make it possible for them to come to a common understanding of respect.

During my country visits I have seen how beneficial efforts to engage in interreligious dialogue can be. At the same time, the absence of such a dialogue may be an early-warning sign for forthcoming interreligious tensions and conflict. It is evident that dialogue alone does not solve the underlying problems; it may, rather, be a first step in the right direction. Interreligious dialogue should not only be an intellectual and theological exercise, it can also activate the silent majority to look for a common strategy on how to find harmony and peace. There are true success stories of interreligious dialogue; however, the grass-root efforts rarely make headlines in the media – unlike interreligious violence.

Let me share with you two experiences from my recent fact-finding missions, which demonstrate that interlocutors do not have to go far in order to conduct a meaningful dialogue. During my visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, I was informed of various interfaith meetings where Israeli and Palestinian residents come together and do not let recent political events hamper their dialogue. One NGO reported: ‘both Israelis and Palestinians spoke of frustration and despair about the extreme attitudes in each society and the reluctance of the majority to work together non-violently to find solutions. Both spoke of the need to hear the other side acknowledge their own violence and express regret.’

Furthermore, in Northern Ireland I witnessed the importance of interreligious dialogue in the neighbourhoods: in Belfast there are many initiatives at the grass-root level that bring together people from different political and religious backgrounds, some of them living next to each other but partitioned by the so-called ‘peace lines’. 
This brings us to the third question: who should be involved in intercultural dialogue? The Millennium World Peace Summit, held in New York in August 2000, brought together over 1,000 religious and spiritual leaders. In their final Commitment to Global Peace they emphasised that no real peace could be achieved unless all communities acknowledged the cultural and religious diversity of the human family in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

Such meetings of religious leaders are important, but, at the same time, interreligious dialogue at the grass-root levels should also be encouraged and nurtured. In my opinion, exchanges of views should, if possible, also include believers who are dispassionate about their faith, as well as atheistic and non-theistic believers and members of religious minorities. Any dialogue would also greatly benefit from the perspectives of women, who tend to be marginalised in major events of interreligious dialogue. Women are one of the worst sufferers of religious intolerance, yet I noticed that women’s groups across religious lines have been very effective human rights advocates in situations of communal tensions.

Sometimes it may also be useful to have present people of the same faith with contrasting opinions. One good example from my recent visit to the United Kingdom is a roundtable discussion in London which also dealt with legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and statutory exceptions to organisations relating to religion or belief. That discussion would have been completely different without the participation of members of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement.

Artists may also play an important role in public education regarding religious tolerance and in building bridges between different communities. One good example is the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which is composed of young Israeli, Palestinian, Lebanese, Syrian, Jordanian and Egyptian musicians. Its founder and conductor, Daniel Barenboim, described the humanitarian idea of this orchestra as follows: ‘We don’t see ourselves as a political project, but rather as a forum where young people from Israel and all Arab countries can express themselves freely and openly whilst at the same time hearing the narrative of the other. It is not necessarily a question of accepting the narrative of the other, let alone agreeing with it, but rather the indispensable need to accept its legitimacy.’

My most recent visit to India, however, has also shown how vulnerable even artists feel vis-à-vis mob pressure on the streets. The visual arts industry there has played an important role in public education regarding religious tolerance. However, some Bollywood films have effectively been banned by non-state actors through intimidation. Regrettably, professionals of the audiovisual arts industry seem to routinely seek the approval of self-appointed custodians of religious sentiments before going ahead with a film which touches upon communal issues. This shows how important the artist’s contribution to intercultural dialogue is – or at least could be. Journalists and lawyers can also make a difference, especially when their statements and actions transcend religious lines. There are innumerable examples where individuals have come to each other’s rescue, crossing all religious boundaries.

Furthermore – and more importantly – politicians would need to undertake a joint brainstorming on how to address the new challenges in a world that is getting even more globalised. Such brainstorming could eventually lead to concrete actions with regard to mainstreaming diversity, for example in housing projects, school curricula and nominations to statutory bodies.

Finally, I would like to raise the fourth question: how can intercultural dialogue be conducted effectively? There are different levels of intercultural dialogue: international and regional organisations such as the UN, EU and OIC can play a role in facilitating platforms for intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, NGOs are currently proposing to advance the culture of peace through dialogue and cooperation between individuals and communities of diverse religions and beliefs through a UN Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace, possibly to run from 2011 to 2020. In this regard it seems vital to have a multitude of good initiatives at global, regional, national or local levels. Let me highlight that it is also possible to use old, new and creative means of communication to establish intercultural dialogue at low cost, for example through penfriend programmes in schools or via Internet chats on specific topics, street theatre and puppet shows.

The EU’s Lifelong Learning Programmes can – and already do – serve as perfect platforms for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The various programmes are indeed examples of good practice: Comenius seeks to develop understanding of and between various European cultures through exchanges and cooperation between schools in different countries; more than 1.5 million students have already participated in the higher education exchange programme Erasmus; the Leonardo da Vinci scheme funds transnational mobility in vocational education and training; the Grundtvig programme provides new learning opportunities, especially for adults at risk of social exclusion and for older workers; and, finally, the Jean Monnet network is stimulating
teaching, research and reflection on European integration at higher education institutions throughout the world. Let me emphasise how important it is for the European Union to reach out to the whole world, especially in the framework of intercultural dialogue.

The role of educational institutions is vital. They could either inculcate a spirit of tolerance or promote tensions, even at an early age. Therefore, the emphasis must lie on enlightened education that teaches children to recognise the diversity that exists. There is a significant potential of voluntary school exchanges with other countries, both in Europe and elsewhere. In this regard I would like to refer to the 2001 International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. It adopted by consensus the Madrid Final Document, which recommended that teachers and students are provided with voluntary opportunities for meetings and exchanges with their counterparts of different religions or beliefs.

The family is another entry point where open-mindedness can either be hampered or nurtured, very much depending on individual upbringing. Furthermore, mixed marriages – quite naturally – give new perspectives and may facilitate intercultural or interreligious dialogue. In my opinion it is important to start at an early age with getting acquainted with the approaches of your neighbours or of other religions. This would not necessarily need to involve long-distance travel, but, for example, could be organised by setting foot and meeting people at your local church, mosque, synagogue, temple or other places of worship. The size of the groups – especially for grass-root interfaith meetings – should not be too big, in order to give the interlocutors an opportunity to speak and to get to know each other personally.

However, there are several potential risks to intercultural dialogue: if not properly conducted, it may turn out to be a superficial, vague and ineffective exercise. Furthermore, intercultural dialogue can also be used as a tool for emphasising the evil sides of the ‘other’. Participants may feel tempted to convince their interlocutors of the superiority of their religion or culture.

Concerning the possible substance of dialogue, there is also a fundamental question to be answered: Should the participants also ask about their respective religions and theological approaches, or would this be dangerous? A positive aspect would be that the interlocutors can become aware of similar approaches but also of differences. However, these differences may be interpreted as sensitive or even offensive. Just think of a discussion focusing on contentious issues such as: Who was the last prophet? Did God have a son? Are religious leaders infallible? What are you supposed to eat or not to? Is there reincarnation?

A tempting alternative might be to look only for non-contentious topics which are not at all related to theology, for example to discuss common environmental concerns. But these topics may be difficult to find and could be quite boring and, ultimately, such an approach would defeat the purpose of a real intercultural and interreligious dialogue. I do not think that it would help to add a layer of ‘religious correctness’ to the existing approach of political correctness.

You sometimes hear from diplomats that we must not engage in criticising religions other than our own. However, I would like to ask: Does dialogue exclude the possibility of criticising the tenets of other religions? In my opinion, in a true dialogue one of the options should also be that the interlocutors ultimately may agree to disagree, obviously while still respecting each other’s views and approaches.

(Applause)

If somebody wants to criticise their counterpart’s religion, it is, of course, advisable do so in an informed manner and to weigh one’s words carefully. Furthermore, it may also help if mutual trust has already been established between the various groups. I firmly believe, however, that it would be wrong to follow the approach of protecting religions per se rather than individuals or groups of believers, as affirmed by international human rights standards.

(Applause)

On many occasions I have voiced concerns that criminalising so-called defamation of religions can be counterproductive, since it may create an atmosphere of intolerance and fear and may even increase the chances of a backlash. Accusations of defamation of religion might stifle legitimate criticism or even research on practices and laws appearing to be in violation of human rights that are – or at least are perceived to be – sanctioned by religion.

Finally, I believe that the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions are prerequisites for the establishment of a favourable climate which would be conducive to real dialogue and understanding. People
need to have trust in the system, and thus diversity within institutions may contribute to creating such an environment. Intercultural dialogue should not be imposed or be designed in a condescending way. The policies of states in this regard should give room and space for the variety of religions and beliefs, thus creating natural opportunities for interaction and understanding.

These are my ideas on the what, why, who and how of intercultural dialogue. I am afraid that, rather than providing comprehensive answers, I may have raised a number of new issues.

In my observations I have already alluded to the potential – but also to possible pitfalls – of intercultural dialogue. It seems crucial to institutionalise an intercultural dialogue at various levels in the right format and with a wide selection of participants, while still allowing for a real exchange of views. I think that joint declarations and statements by religious leaders are important; however, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the vital role of grass-root initiatives, concrete meetings and joint actions. I also believe that it is better to have a war of words than to have tensions that are long-lasting. When average, theistic, atheistic and non-theistic believers get together, some of them perhaps for the first time ever, they – hopefully – learn a lot from each other, even if they finally disagree on substantive issues.

Universal values should serve as a bridge between different religions and beliefs, and I do not accept the fact that universal values of human rights can be and should be subservient to either social or religious norms.

(Applause)

This may, ultimately, also lead to the reinforcement of universal human rights, both in terms of promoting and protecting human rights and freedoms.

In conclusion I would like to cite Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the former UN Secretary-General, who said: ‘Human rights, when viewed from a universal perspective, force us to face the most demanding of all dialectics: the dialectics of identity and otherness, of “self” and “the other”. They teach us, in the most direct way, that we are, at one and the same time, the same and different.’

(The House accorded the speaker a standing ovation.)

President. – Dr Jahangir, thank you very much for your address. We have listened very carefully to what you have said, which was based on your respect for human rights, your wealth of experience, and what the important work you do is all about.

I hope your visit to the European Parliament will give us the opportunity for wider cooperation in our common mission for democracy, peace and development.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA
Vice-President

6. Voting time (continued)

6.1. Internal market in electricity (A6-0191/2008, Eluned Morgan) (vote)

– Before the vote:

Eluned Morgan, rapporteur. – Mr President, this report is the first in a package of measures dealing with the energy markets in the EU. There has been a great deal of cooperation between all the rapporteurs and the shadows on this package and we would like to send a message to the Council that we intend to negotiate this as a package, not as a series of individual reports.

There is one aspect of the Electricity Directive which has caused a great deal of division within the Parliament. This is, unusually, broken down on a national basis, not on a party political basis. I would urge colleagues, however, to consider the report as a whole. It includes tackling energy poverty, better rights for consumers and measures to make the market work better.

– Before the vote on Amendment 169:

Anni Podimata (PSE).—(EL) Mr President, let me request, under Rule 150(5) of the Rules of Procedure, that the amendment be kept on the voting list, since it has been supported by 40 Members.
6.2. Conditions for access to the network for cross-border exchanges in electricity (A6-0228/2008, Alejo Vidal-Quadras) (vote)

— Before the vote on Article 2e:

Alejo Vidal-Quadras, rapporteur. — (ES) Mr President, I wish to add the following to Article 2e. I will read it out in English:

‘The European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity shall collect all relevant information regarding the implementation of the network codes and submit it to the Agency for evaluation;’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

6.3. Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (A6-0226/2008, Giles Chichester) (vote)

— Before the vote:

Silvia-Adriana Ţicău (PSE). — (FR) Mr President, I would like to ask for a separate vote on Amendment 18 because it deals with the Agency’s seat. I am thus calling for a separate vote.

Giles Chichester, rapporteur. — Mr President, I object to this request. This report is a package which has been agreed amongst the groups. I do not think it is appropriate to make a request after the deadline and to open up the package in this way, so I ask my colleagues to join me in objecting to this.

(Parliament rejected the request)

6.4. Protection of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users (A6-0081/2008, Francesco Ferrari) (vote)

6.5. Adaptation of a number of instruments to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny, ”omnibus” Regulation, Part One (A6-0088/2008, József Szájer) (vote)

— Before the vote:

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. — (SL) Permit me this opportunity to convey my satisfaction on behalf of the Council at the good results of the long-term and extensive work on this technical dossier. It was possible to conclude this dossier primarily thanks to the creative cooperation of all three institutions, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank especially the rapporteur, József Szájer, for his cooperation and the work done.

Now that this part of the adjustment has been concluded, both legislative branches, and especially the European Parliament, will be able to exercise control over the executive powers of the Commission in connection with numerous legislative acts in important fields. In conclusion I would also like to see this kind of creative cooperation continue during the coming French Presidency.

József Szájer, rapporteur. — Mr President, as a result of the vote just cast, for the first time Parliament acquires the real right of control and veto over the normative executive acts of the European Commission on an equal footing with the Council.

By adopting the two omnibus packages we take a very big step in eliminating the democratic deficit of the Union. I also want to remind colleagues that our new power of control over the EU executive requires from us more work than before. Parliament has to prepare itself for the new task of the comitology procedure.

I thank the Council, and especially the Slovenian presidency, and the Commission, particularly because they both are giving up important and so far exclusive rights and conceding them to Parliament, and they are
both losing exclusive powers. I would also like to thank our colleagues in the respective committees who understand the importance of the new empowerment of the European Parliament. They acted very quickly and flexibly on this dossier. Our vote today will contribute greatly to a better, more democratic and a much more transparent European Union. Thank you for your support.

(Applause)

6.6. Adaptation of a number of instruments to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny, ”omnibus” Regulation, Part Three (A6-0086/2008, József Szájer) (vote)

6.7. Autonomous Community tariff quotas on imports of certain fishery products into the Canary Islands (A6-0213/2008, Gerardo Galeote) (vote)


– Before the vote on Amendment 8:

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) The Presidency wishes on behalf of the Council to confirm its approval of the amendment of the Statute for the European Ombudsman, which has been the subject of voting in this esteemed assembly.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Parliament and the European Commission for their creative cooperation. On the basis of this creative cooperation, we reached agreement on the modification of the Statute in a relatively short time. Special thanks on behalf of the Council are owed to the rapporteur Mrs Jäätteenmäki, the chairman of the AFCO committee Mr Leinen, and Mr Méndez de Vigo MEP.

The Council welcomes this important achievement. Indeed we believe that the amendment of the Statute will increase the confidence of citizens in the proper functioning of European institutions and the European Union as a whole.

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

7. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

– Approval of the new allocation of the responsibilities of Vice-President of the Commission Jacques Barrot (B6-0306/2008)

Urszula Gacek (PPE-DE).–(PL) Mr President, I supported Commissioner Barrot’s candidacy in today’s vote. The Commissioner has undertaken to adopt a strong stance in negotiations with the United States on the issue of visa-free tourist travel for citizens of all European Union countries. In addition, the Commissioner’s proposal on tackling the problems of asylum seekers in the spirit of solidarity, and notably providing assistance to countries such as Poland who are responsible for securing the external borders of the Schengen area, has convinced me that Commissioner Barrot has a sound grasp of the problems within the remit of the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security.


Jean-Luc Bennahmias, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FR) Mr President, first of all I would like to apologise for my absence during this crucial vote. As the train from Paris to Strasbourg was one and a quarter hours late several of my colleagues and I were unable to vote on this Directive and resolution. Like my group I would have voted completely against the resolution and the directive.

I wish here and now to express my deepest disgust. The dignity of this Parliament and of the wider European Union is not in keeping with the detention centres in which we house tens, hundreds or even thousands of
our fellow citizens who are immigrants or are from an immigrant background. All this seems to smack of self-protection on the part of the European Union, which is something that I and my group find unacceptable.

Of course measures need to be taken today to control migratory flows, but the defensive actions that have just been voted on are not a proper response to economic migration or to climate migration, which will not be long in coming. If the European Union, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council were to provide the development aid that is so essentially needed then perhaps we would be entitled to react in this way, but we are not there yet. Where we are at, in fact, is 0.38% of the budget instead of 0.42%, after having planned for 0.7%.

Let me say this in all seriousness: I am ashamed for our Parliament and I am ashamed for the European Union that we are seeking to build, which should be a Union that is open and hospitable and that is able to welcome into its fold all citizens of the world.

Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (DE) Mr President, the compromise reached between the European Parliament’s rapporteur, Mr Weber, and the Home Affairs Ministers on the so-called Returns Directive is a bad compromise which casts doubt on the European Union’s credibility in the field of human rights. My group therefore resoundingly rejects the Directive.

As a co-legislator, Parliament had a legal and moral duty to work to achieve rules which are acceptable but above all, are compatible with human dignity. It should have exercised this responsibility in full and fought for such rules. Instead, a majority in Parliament has allowed the Council to impose its own rules, purely and simply so that the Directive can be pushed through at first reading. Even though the Directive might improve the legal position in some individual Member States, perhaps because national law does not set an upper limit on the period of detention, it is the overall context which is crucial.

The Directive legitimises up to 18 months’ detention for people whose only ‘crime’ is to seek a better life for themselves and their family in Europe. In our view, current deportation practice in the Member States does not justify or excuse treating the needy as criminals now or in future. Instead of giving their blessing to the current practice – which violates the human rights of ‘illegally staying third-country nationals’ – at European level as well, the Member States should be looking for a lasting solution to the problem of migration.

For our Group, this means, above all, finally establishing a common legal immigration policy which safeguards the human rights of migrants and offers prospects to people in great need who enter Europe, often risking their lives to do so.

The European Parliament has missed the opportunity to act on its responsibility here and stand fast against the Council. The urgent appeals of numerous human rights organisations and the churches have unfortunately been ignored.

Kinga Gál (PPE-DE). – (HU) I too would like to add an explanation of my vote on the Weber report. As a Member of this Parliament I believe it is important to adopt this report, which represents a first step towards a European Union policy on immigration. At the same time, as a human rights and minority rights lawyer I believe that my yes vote is justified. The Weber report is the result of a difficult compromise, in the course of which Parliament has been able to ensure that a good number of humanitarian and human rights viewpoints have been incorporated in the text. In areas where there is no regulation, this represents progress. In areas where there is already broad-based regulation, it cannot pull down higher standards. As is the case with all compromises, there are weak points, vulnerable points in the text. I therefore understand the reservations expressed by religious organisations and lay persons, and I agree with them that we cannot allow the high-flown language of the legislation to be used to circumvent humanitarian or human rights considerations. We cannot allow this text to be the source of new tragedies or for splitting families up; there has already been enough suffering in the lives of immigrants who come to us seeking a more humane existence. Thank you.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I voted for the Weber report, but I have to say to you that it was with some reservations. People on the left and the extreme left have raised a hue and cry against the Directive. They have presented it as if the human rights of the illegal migrants are being blatantly denied by the Directive, whereas in fact the opposite is the case. In the first place, for instance, the regularisation of illegal migrants by a European Directive will be pushed forward as an acceptable policy option. The Member States will also be obliged to provide free legal assistance to illegal migrants who request it.

It is not acceptable to let people gain rights from a situation of illegality. Apart from that many elements in the Directive are entirely without obligation. Having said that, the Directive offers some Member States the
opportunity to detain illegal migrants for longer with a view to their deportation. Another positive provision is the five-year re-entry ban following a deportation to prevent them from coming into the rest of Europe. The immigration problem requires much more radical measures than those supported in this report, but it is a step in the right direction.

**Frank Vanhecke (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, let us take a moment to look at the figures. In about 100 years the world population will have multiplied about sevenfold, from 1 billion to 7 billion people. This population explosion cannot continue without consequences for a prosperous European continent that also has to contend with a huge demographic deficit. The immigration problems that we have today are very serious indeed, but they are still manageable compared with what will descend on us in decades to come. When we look at it from this perspective, the measures provided for in this supposed Returns Directive are actually futile and are certainly insufficient. We will need to do a great deal more than these half-hearted measures taking two steps forward and one step back to stem the illegal flow. However, because a small signal for a policy to return illegal migrants is better than nothing at all, I voted for the Weber report but without enthusiasm.

**Romano Maria La Russa (UEN).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today, by voting in favour of the Weber report, we may have taken a crucial step towards drawing up a comprehensive framework of measures against illegal immigration: measures that will respond to the security demands of a huge number of European citizens, many of them victims of crime perpetrated by third-country nationals.

I am pleased to ascertain, to note, that the European Parliament, guarantor of universal freedom and rights, has at last come out in favour of a common policy to meet the needs of Member States in the fight against illegal immigration. We have made clear that the aim is not just to detect those who are staying illegally, but also to put in place clear, transparent and rapid return procedures. It is therefore not only a matter of clamping down on the phenomenon, as some would have it, for instance with the re-entry ban … (The President cut off the speaker)

**Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE).** – (ES) I voted in favour of some amendments – four, to be precise – that sought to improve this directive. However, I also voted in favour of the final directive, even though these amendments were not approved.

I believe that this directive substantially improves the rights of irregularly-staying immigrants in many European Union countries. That is something that cannot be denied: we only have to compare the laws that currently exist throughout the Union.

Obviously it is not the directive that some of us would have drawn up if we had had the chance to do so, if each of us had been left to prepare it individually. However, there has to be balance in the codecision procedure between the legitimacy of the European Parliament and the legitimacy of all of the national parliaments and governments.

It is the national parliaments that now bear a great responsibility in terms of applying this directive, just as the European Commission and the Court of Justice have to monitor its application. From now on, restrictions on rights in the Member States are subject to European law; they are no longer national decisions.

**Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to see that I am still admired by many colleagues, whom I should of course like to thank for having waited to hear why I voted in favour of the Weber report.

Mr President, I believe that we are facing something not very different from the Barbarian invasions of the Roman Empire 2 000 and more years ago. At that time the Roman Empire was invaded by armed troops, and the Romans took up arms to defend themselves but succumbed, as we all know, in tragic circumstances.

Now that Europe is the destination of inhabitants of all the other countries in the world – they are quite right, of course, because they are hungry, just as the Barbarians were hungry and wanted to nourish themselves at the fountains of Rome – Europe is entitled to defend itself and to establish that those wishing to invade our territory must be escorted back to the border.

**Jean-Claude Martinez (NI).** – (FR) Mr President, with 10 million illegal immigrants in Europe and with a Boeing holding 300 passengers we would need to fill more than 30 000 Boeings in order to meet the provisions of the Directive on the return process. That means more than 1 000 Boeings taking off from each of the 27 European capitals over a period of three years.
In terms of numbers this would clearly be a mad and surreal proposal. However, there is something even more insane. As immigration is in fact nothing more than the social reflection of economic globalisation, where world capitalism makes workers compete with each other, what we are doing is producing a Directive to deal with the reflection of a problem. I do not know if this is a case of hypocrisy or someone's idea of a joke, but in any case it is certainly short-sighted. The nomads of the planet keep on the move because they want to eat and drink, look after themselves and educate themselves. Food and the shortage of it, water and the distribution of it, pandemics and the manner in which they spread are all now part of what the nations of the world have in common. The sooner we act together to tackle and manage politically our common problems the sooner we will be able to ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, the emigrationists have waged a disinformation campaign against this Directive on the return of illegal immigrants, which they call the 'Directive of shame'. This is no more than well-organised political play-acting between left and right. The left protests in order to obtain additional rights for immigrants and when it gets them it pretends that the whole process is firm and rigid. In reality the document as amended protects the rights of returnable immigrants and their continued stay in Europe much more than it ensures their repatriation. Holding people in detention centres is an extremely restricted measure of last resort and the 18-month detention period is the absolute upper limit to be used in very exceptional cases only. Those countries that have legal limits below this will retain them. The deadline for voluntary return saves those concerned from being banned from the territory of the European Union and Member States are called on to regularise this on the slightest pretext. In other words, France, which has the most lenient legislation in all Europe, will not be forced to change it, even less to take a harder line. Mr Sarkozy may want people to think the opposite, helped out by the posturing of the left. It is only because of some of the positive aspects of this document that ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Mr President, there was a wonderful symbolism this morning. One after another the speakers stood up and said that they would respect the Irish people. Then immediately afterwards in the vote we pushed through this report, which is the first step towards creating a common policy on immigration and asylum, which would have been a large part of the Lisbon Treaty.

If we were serious about respecting the vote of the Irish people, far from proceeding with this stealthy implementation of the provisions of that text, we would start reversing those parts that were brought in in anticipation of a 'yes' vote, including the European External Action Service and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Mrs Wallström said this morning that it was important to find out why people had voted no. What had they been voting against? she asked. Let me help her with that: I suggest that they were voting against the Lisbon Treaty. The give-away was the ballot paper which asked whether they wanted to approve the Lisbon Treaty.

Mr Cohn-Bendit said that it would be quite wrong to have one million people deciding the fate of half a billion Europeans. Well, I am happy to agree with that. Give the half billion their referendums too. Pactio Olisipiensis censenda est!

(Applause)


Richard Seeber (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I rejected this report because it misses the target on three important points. Firstly, it was not possible to secure the adoption of Amendments 170 and 171, which were particularly important in terms of regional networks and would have created exemptions which are justified on grounds of size.

Secondly, the third way was also not accepted. It is important to have planning predictability in the energy sector, but unfortunately, the Commission prevailed with its legal unbundling and total unbundling. In my view, this is unlikely to move us in the right direction.

Thirdly, we failed to establish liability for the nuclear industry in the event of accidents. For all these reasons, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) opposed the report and was unable to vote in favour of the package.
Tomáš Zatloukal (PPE-DE). – (CS) I voted for the report by my fellow Member Mrs Morgan because I agree that it is necessary to ensure a secure supply of gas and electricity, a sustainable, low-carbon energy market and global competitiveness. How to reach this goal was one of the issues debated here in plenary yesterday. There is no clear-cut evidence to prove that full ownership unbundling automatically leads to increased investment and improved network performance. In this regard, I can still see some room for manoeuvre in the search for a solution that is beneficial both to consumers and other parties who might wish to enter the market. In order to create a pan-European electricity market, we need more intensive regional cooperation in the area of cross-border transmission and coordination of investment and operational activities. Consequently, I support the principle of strengthening the mechanisms coordinating regional cooperation.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, the common market implies greater competition and consequently higher standards. Participants in the market are therefore obliged to make the appropriate investments and improve the capacity of their distribution networks. This results in safer supplies and fewer problems with energy supply. The creation of an internal market in energy is very important, as we can observe that the demand for energy is constantly increasing. The internal market in energy represents an important step in the right direction, but it is still not enough to ensure Europe’s energy security. We need to create a common energy policy in the spirit of solidarity. Suitable mechanisms should be devised, allowing Member States to support each other if energy crises arise. It is even more important, however, for Europe to at last begin to speak with one voice on external energy policy. Energy security can only be achieved through a cohesive, effective and above all common policy.

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I voted in favour of the Morgan report. I thought there were some very important elements there. We obviously need a far more competitive energy industry in Europe to ensure that everyone across Europe benefits from better competition, lower prices and better-value quality services.

I particularly welcomed the passage on decentralised generation, especially where it said, ‘We must ensure that power is returned to the people through support for local and micro generation’. Those of us who support direct democracy in a localism agenda would say, ‘Why stop at energy?’ Why not devolve more power in a whole series of areas, not only back to national governments, but also to local communities – those people closest to the issue that is being legislated on? Here I sit with my colleagues, Daniel Hannan and Chris Heaton-Harris, who are also members of a great organisation called the Direct Democracy Movement. If you truly believe in power to the people, we should devolve power back to them and ask them what they want. If you truly ask them about the Lisbon Treaty – as we did in Ireland – they would say ‘no’.

Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I too supported the Morgan report because I am convinced that we should be unbundling ownership fully in this particular sector, and the experience of Member States indicates that full ownership unbundling leads to increased investment and improved network performance.

However, I want to talk about local generation as well, because I believe this is a good step forward, as long as local projects are supported by local people and benefit the local area.

In the region I represent, in the constituency of Daventry, we have a number of unwanted wind-farm proposals. Some have been defeated, some are coming forward, but none will service the local area. They are all based on some sort of new ‘subsidy farming’ created by a British Government directive stating that we need to head down this particular route of renewables and nothing else. It is a very short-sighted focus on what we should be doing.

So surely, if we are going to go down to the most local of areas to produce our energy, we should trust the people locally to take on the solutions that they need.


Richard Seeber, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I voted in favour of this report. I think it is sensible to have a European internal market in the energy sector, so we need a network of transmission system operators. However, we must ensure that when it comes to implementation, we genuinely create a level playing field but provide leeway for regional exemptions at the same time. It must be possible to provide cross-subsidies between various energy sectors in order to secure the energy supply in Europe’s most remote regions and valleys and on its islands. We can assume that supplying energy here is far more expensive and therefore less financially attractive to companies, so we need to be able to strike a proper balance here.
I have one brief comment for my British colleagues: as I understand it, there has only ever been one referendum held in Great Britain, namely on accession to the Community. Perhaps you should change your national constitution to allow the introduction of this instrument of direct democracy. That is something which I would greatly welcome.

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I apologise for my tardiness in getting up to speak. I was applauding the previous speaker who made a very valuable conclusion to his speech.

My comments are also relevant to the Chichester report, so I think I will take the comments together rather than asking for two separate speaking times. In some ways this report may highlight one of the potential flaws in the thinking of the Eurocrats and people who quite often sit in this House, namely that, whatever the problem, Europe has to be the solution. Of course I welcome an agency of European regulators where national regulators are working together, but let us not forget that quite often the regulators who are best placed to understand local circumstances are national regulators.

Let us not allow this body to become a European super-regulator. Let us make sure that the regulator understands local nuances and is truly accountable to local people. If we were accountable to local people, then they would have the opportunity to vote against the Constitution.


**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I am already thinking of my press release and I think I shall start by speaking ‘to a packed House’ – although maybe I should just say speaking ‘to a packed interpretation booth’. I appreciate the interpreters for staying on, missing their lunch and listening to these things.

I am an English soccer referee and I therefore fear every Polish politician in this House who wants to kill such a person. However, I was thinking, after watching the football last night – especially the France-Italy game – that maybe the French team should do what their political masters do and completely ignore the result and turn up at the quarter finals anyway, because that is what we are going to do with the Lisbon Treaty in this place.

The reason – and, Mr President, you might wonder how I am going to get to the report, and so do I sometimes – we do not need the Lisbon Treaty is proved within this report. The EU will not grind to a halt without this Treaty. Today we successfully voted on a massive change in institutional organisation in this place – and we did not need an extra treaty to do it.

**Written explanations of vote**

– **Approval of the new allocation of the responsibilities of Vice-President of the Commission Jacques Barrot (B6-0306/2008)**

**Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I appreciate very much the firmness and lack of doubt with which Mr. Barrot undertook to support the rights related to the European citizenship and, in particular, the freedom of movement, on the occasion of his hearing on Monday.

The rights and freedoms of the European citizens are the most important gains from the European integration and should not be jeopardized under any circumstance and no matter the reasons that might be invoked.

The citizens of the country I represent in this forum, Romania, watch carefully and with concern the discussions regarding the freedom of movement from certain Member States.

The Romanian citizens from abroad, who are, most of them, correct and hard-working workers, bring incontestable benefits to the economies of the countries where they work.

They – and I am convinced that they are not the only ones – are expecting the European Commission to play an active and firm role in defending the full freedom of movement.

I hope with all my heart that Mr. Barrot’s entire mandate will stay under the sign of this commitment to defend the rights of the European citizens.
Carlos Coelho (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) We are confronted by a humanitarian drama in which families are not only suffering the pain of their relatives being missing, but have also had to live for decades with the agony of not knowing their fate.

For this reason, I consider it vital that all parties concerned continue to cooperate constructively so that the investigations being carried out into the fate of all missing persons in Cyprus can be speedily completed.

The role played by the CMP (Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus) is also vital in terms of identifying any human remains found.

As the EU’s financial contribution to the CMP project only covers the period to the end of 2008, I therefore support the allocation of further financial assistance to the CMP so that it can continue its activities in 2009. This contribution should also enable it to increase its capacity, particularly in the field, to hire more scientists and to fund more equipment as necessary.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) We have nothing against the Cypriot committee getting further help and financial contributions for its continued work, but we think that the money should be allocated to the Red Cross, which has experience and expertise in the field. We therefore choose to vote against the proposal.

Ewa Klamt (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) As the rapporteur, I welcome the European Parliament’s overwhelming endorsement of the resolution on missing persons in Cyprus. It is the right of every relative of the missing persons to know their fate through the exhumation and identification of the remains. Locating the remains of their relatives, who have been missing for decades, and giving them a decent burial is the only way for Greek and Turkish Cypriots to close this painful chapter in their lives, for it finally gives them certain knowledge of the fate of their loved ones. I am convinced that this can make an important contribution to the positive moves towards the reunification of Cyprus.

Through the provision of funding, the EU is already actively supporting the work of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) at the exhumation sites, in the anthropological laboratories and with the families concerned. It is important, in this context, that the Committee on Missing Persons should carry out all the necessary investigations and analyses while there are still eyewitnesses available who can provide information about this humanitarian problem of missing persons.

I therefore consider it essential to provide for an additional amount of EUR 2 million in the general budget of the European Union for 2009, and would urge the Council and the European Commission to reach agreement on this extra financial support.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM), in writing. – I voted against this report because it makes it harder for nation states to return illegal immigrants. And once given residence in EU Member States, those illegal immigrants would find it easier to enter Britain, thereby adding to the burden of illegal immigration in the UK. Immigration and asylum policy should in any case be decided by democratic nation states not the European Union.

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Thank you, Mr President. I voted against the Weber report following the rejection of the PSE amendments.

There is undoubtedly a need for legislation in this highly sensitive area, not least in view of the arbitrary interpretations often applied by Member States. Nevertheless, the current proposal contains unwarranted shortcomings. For example, the treatment envisaged for unaccompanied minors is unacceptable, as is the failure to include guarantees for persons in difficulty, such as victims of trafficking, pregnant women, the elderly and the disabled.

Another absurdity is the provision whereby the period of detention may be increased in the absence of ‘administrative’ cooperation from the country of origin. The situation of Sudanese refugees, for instance, will be dependent on the efficiency of municipal registry offices. We needed firm rules to guarantee the safety of our citizens, not harassment which is an affront to human dignity. Europe has written an ugly page of its history today.
Michael Cashman (PSE), in writing. — The European Parliamentary Labour Party (EPLP) has abstained on the legislative proposal, due to the fact the UK is not obliged to follow this Directive, as it has an opt-out/opt in on JHA measures concerning immigration and asylum. However it was very important to consider our responsibility carefully as it would have had a direct effect on those countries legally bound by this Directive.

The Weber report required a series of amendments that would have improved on the rapporteur’s draft. It was important that the report should have included the particular amendments as recommended by the PSE Group. As these amendments were not adopted we have abstained on this report. These were:

Amendment 98 ensuring the protecting of unaccompanied minors;
Amendment 103 concerning the length of detention and conditions;
Amendment 95 on the definition of the risk of absconding.

Overall the EPLP feels that this report did not enhance the capabilities of EU States to deal effectively yet humanely with the returning of third country nationals residing illegally in the EU but has instead added extra burdens to an already complicated and highly emotionally charged issue.

Maria da Assunção Esteves (PPE-DE), in writing. — (PT) The Directive on illegal immigration poses an impossible dilemma. On the one hand, the lack of rules opens the door to many cases of inhumane practices involving immigrants. On the other hand, there is little positive consensus on this Directive, which is built around many vague concepts and references to the discretion of Member States. In other words, this Directive is weak. The compromise agreement does not achieve the ambition of a European Europe. Parliament now has the impossible task of choosing between chaos leading to barbarism and poor or incomplete rules, without having made any of the noise that a true parliament should make. Due to sheer bad luck, nothing more can be expected from the Council, and the Commission is dragging its feet in setting up a European solidarity fund with the countries of origin of illegal immigration and with the Member States in southern Europe which are directly suffering the misery. It is ironic that a sincere vote today means voting with your eyes closed.

Nigel Farage (IND/DEM), in writing. — We voted to reject the report because we don’t want any kind of European Common Immigration Policy. We feel that it should be up to individual states to decide who is expelled from their territory and under what circumstances.

Whilst we almost never vote for any legislation, we would like to point out that we did vote in favour of Amendment 75, which rejected the Commission’s proposal for a common expulsion policy, but not for the reasons/justification given by the group which tabled the amendment. We had our own reasons for rejection.

This is regardless of the fact this directive does not apply in the UK. It is the principle behind this that drove our voting decision.

Patrick Gaubert (PPE-DE), in writing. — (FR) I am pleased that the Weber report on the Returns Directive has been adopted by a large majority.

This vote is the very illustration of the fact that the European Parliament has not given in to the populist and electioneering campaign that was waged against this proposal for a directive, but has instead preferred to take the path of responsibility and pragmatism.

Parliament has demonstrated maturity and a sense of conscience in adopting a document that will unquestionably increase the level of protection afforded to third-country nationals living in those Member States where such protection is at the lowest level, or even nonexistent.

This vote has the double merit of not undermining those current national provisions that already provide sufficient guarantees – as in the case of France, for example – while at the same time taking those Member States whose systems are the most restrictive and the least protective to a more humane level.

This text, which does not concern asylum seekers, is only the first move towards the framing and basic harmonisation of rules on immigration. It should not be taken in isolation but is to be seen as part of the EU’s global policy for the promotion of legal migration, which is something Europe needs.

Robert Goebbels (PSE), in writing. — (FR) I voted against the Returns Directive. I was prepared to support a Directive that, far from being perfect, would provide useful guidelines for those European Member States having no immigration laws of their own, or indeed for those whose legislation is too harsh.
As a majority of the right and Liberals rejected the 10 Socialist amendments, including those relating to better protection for minors, I voted ‘no’ in the end along with most of my political group. I am still convinced that, even if it cannot take care of all the woes of the world, Europe should remain open to immigration that is positively framed and supervised.

Illegal immigration, with its trail of human tragedy and misery and with the criminality that is linked to illegal networks of this kind, needs to be combated. Third-country nationals who have entered illegally should be repatriated, but this has to be done by way of a process that is worthy of a legally constituted state.

I was ready to support a Directive that, far from being perfect, would provide useful guidelines for those nine European Member States that have no immigration laws of their own, or indeed for those whose legislation is too harsh.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing.

The June List takes a very critical view of this report and the compromise which is being supported by certain political parties. A country’s refugee policy is a strictly national matter and it must be decided within the context of the country’s legal culture. Through this report the EU takes a major step towards imposing a European migration policy which comes down hard on illegal immigrants. What is in prospect is the arbitrary and systematic detention of persons who have not committed any crime, but have merely crossed an international border. The report proposes that people should be totally excluded from European territory for a period of five years, irrespective of their situation, which in effect means Fortress Europe.

The EU is supposed to be a Union of values which holds human rights and human values sacred, but this proposal flies in the face of that. Organisations such as the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees already exist to uphold the human rights of vulnerable people and to stipulate acceptable rules and standards for humane treatment.

The June List rejects this report and hopes that other Members will do the same.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Regrettably, the proposal that we made to reject this ignoble Directive was itself rejected by a majority of this House, due to the Social Democrats and the right banding together.

Through our vote, we tried to prevent the Council agreement from going forward as this aims to create a Community immigration policy that is restrictive, selective and criminalising and that does not respect the human rights of immigrants.

The numerous unacceptable aspects of this Directive include: the possibility of detaining immigrants for a maximum period of 18 months; the detention of families, even with minors; the expulsion of minors without them having to be delivered to a member of their family or a legally appointed guardian, and the limitation on entry into EU countries, for a period of up to five years, for an immigrant who has been expelled.

If the EU institutions want to adopt measures on immigrants, they should suggest that the Member States ratify the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

The dignity of human beings cannot be called into question. Their rights must be protected and recognised, regardless of their documentation situation. We must not introduce policies that violate human rights and criminalise men and women who only aspire to a job and, in many cases, to the basic right to life.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges (PPE-DE), in writing – (FR) Human rights are not negotiable.

Deprivation of liberty, as provided for in this document, is a serious act, even when it is for a restricted period. Why are we not talking about welcoming those who arrive on the territory of Europe and about the reception facilities instead of the detention centres? We have known for decades that smugglers have a criminal interest in human trafficking and that often there are accomplices involved in catering for these illegal workers, who are poorly paid and badly housed.

I feel that legal measures are urgently needed to counter the activities of these people smugglers and traffickers. As far as voluntary return policies are concerned, supporting these with a policy of targeted cooperation would send a better signal than imprisoning those who are not guilty of anything. We do not own the earth, we do not have the right to consider ourselves masters of the continent and even legally constituted states like ours are not entitled to contravene the right to the integrity of the person.
Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing. − I voted against the Weber report and deplore the terms of the proposed Returns Directive. The Directive will allow Member States to detain migrants for up to 18 months, even for reasons outside their control. This is not the mark of a civilised immigration policy and falls short of the standards we should expect of the EU.

Mikel Irujo Amezaga (Verts/ALE), in writing. − (ES) I voted against this report: it is a very delicate topic as it affects more and more people, and the fact that it is being treated as a logistical rather than a human problem is intolerable. Many of the provisions are simply unacceptable: the introduction of a ban on re-entry to European territory for up to five years, the possibility of detaining families and unaccompanied minors, the possibility of sending people back via transit zones, the low level of protection afforded to people vulnerable to separation, the fact that it does not prevent the detention of asylum-seekers, and the lack of significant guarantees in terms of return and custody decisions.

Furthermore, immigration is closely linked to the development policy. The EU must establish the measures and aid needed to ensure genuine development in third countries. Immigrants and irregularly-staying immigrants have not chosen to be in that position: they cannot stay in their homeland because in many cases their basic needs are not covered. In the 21st century, that is a fact that should put us to shame.

Jaromír Kohlíček (GUE/NGL), in writing. − (CS) Returning illegal immigrants to their country of origin is a highly controversial subject. A broader interpretation of the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the 1951 United Nations Convention related to the Status of Refugees, as amended by the 1967 Protocol, and the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child mostly prohibits such actions. When I take into account the criticisms of the committees (for example the LIBE Committee), in addition to the above-mentioned texts, I must say that a Directive that makes it possible to detain people for 18 months, as well as the conditions experienced by visiting Members in detention centres, only make the controversy more obvious. Any person who commits a criminal act should be punished, including those who employ the third-country nationals, illegally and under poor conditions. There is no way that the GUE/NGL Group could possibly support this Directive.

Romano Maria La Russa (UEN), in writing. − (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today, by voting in favour of the Weber report, we may have taken a crucial step towards drawing up a comprehensive framework of measures against illegal immigration: measures that will respond to the security demands of a huge number of European citizens, many of them victims of crime perpetrated by third-country nationals.

I am pleased to note that the European Parliament, guarantor of universal freedom and rights, has at last come out in favour of a common policy to meet the needs of Member States in the fight against illegal immigration. We have made clear that the aim is not just to detect those who are staying illegally, but also to put in place clear, transparent and rapid return procedures.

It is not only a matter of clamping down on the phenomenon, for instance with the re-entry ban, but also of providing help for minors. These measures are geared to scrupulous respect for human rights in reception centres. Illegal immigration must be combated above all by seeking agreements with the countries of origin, which cannot stand by and watch the unfolding of a tragedy that is no longer just national but also European, and by sending out a strong signal to those preparing to enter Europe illegally. Our continent is not a land of conquest for anyone and everyone, and there are duties as well as rights to be respected.

Carl Lang (NI), in writing. − (FR) There has been a lot of noise from the left and far left aimed at stigmatising the Weber report, Parliament’s interpretation of the Returns Directive, which does not quite measure up to what is needed as far as immigration policy is concerned.

We hardly dare state the obvious that to cross a frontier illegally without a visa or residence permit is an illicit act and should be treated as such.

In deliberately losing their papers or refusing to say where they come from, so as not to be returned to their country of origin, illegal immigrants and they alone are responsible for the period they spend in detention, which some believe, wrongly, is too long.

To talk about human rights only masks the reality of the situation: Europe is being swamped by illegal immigration, which in essence cannot be controlled, and this is coming on top of the legal migration that is being encouraged by national and European authorities alike.
The Weber report, while inadequate for the purpose, is a step in the right direction. I hope that this is merely the first stage. Are national governments and the European Parliament at last waking up to the scale of the problem? It is already quite late in the day ...

Roselyne Lefrançois (PSE), in writing. – (FR) The document that has been adopted today constitutes a total rethink of the work that was done in the LIBE Committee, which had paved the way for a significant improvement on the Commission’s original proposal.

This so-called compromise will in effect not bring about any changes likely to improve the degree of protection afforded to persons living in those Member States that have the least acceptable immigration policies. The first reason for this is the restricted scope of the document: asylum seekers and persons who have been detained at border controls are excluded from it, even though they represent a significant proportion of all illegal immigrants. Another more relevant reason is because it gives Member States far too much latitude when it comes to key questions such as the rights of minors and the length of the detention period. The latter has now been extended to 18 months, as compared with the six months proposed by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

I am ashamed that a majority in this House has supported the idea of locking up for such a long period people whose only crime is to have come here in search of better living conditions and who are often in an extremely vulnerable state.

I have voted in all conscience against the document. If some basic common rules are indeed necessary then these should be drawn up as part of a responsible and humane approach to illegal immigration and on no account should they be introduced at the cost of sacrificing the fundamental rights and values that we hold dear.

Marine Le Pen (NI), in writing. – (FR) The highly publicised ‘Returns Directive’, as proposed by the Commission in Brussels and quite wrongly stigmatised by the left and far left as the ‘Directive of shame’, the violator of human rights, has just been adopted by the European Parliament, to their great displeasure.

However, this Directive, which is supposed to provide for the return of illegal immigrants, is not repressive at all. It does not criminalise immigrants who have entered Europe illegally. Better than that, it gives them the choice between legalisation and voluntary return, all this backed up by privileges and guarantees that protect essential human rights.

What about the right of people to protect themselves and not to be submerged by global immigration? Nothing.

Fortress Europe as decried by all the media in France and elsewhere does not exist. It is a fantasy created to ease the way for legislation that is favourably inclined towards immigration and immigrants under the guise of a semblance of repression.

This is not a good Directive. It is all a front. However it does have the sole merit of representing the first step towards a less immigrationist policy. It should not obscure the fact that other provisions are being drawn up, such as the European Blue Card system guaranteeing legal immigration for employment purposes, and that the stated aim of these measures is solely to encourage more immigration into Europe.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) I voted in favour of the Weber report because I believe that the European Union can only combat and prevent illegal immigration with common rules which are tough but fair. This Returns Directive is a successful start to a common European immigration policy.

Europe can only open up to legal immigration if illegal immigration is clearly defined and can be tackled effectively on the basis of common rules.

In my view, the Directive takes due account of humanitarian concerns about the deportation process, notably through the introduction of a maximum detention period of six months. Given that nine Member States, including Luxembourg, previously had no maximum limit on detention, this is a major step forward.

Persons affected by a deportation procedure will now also have the right to judicial remedy before a court or tribunal in order to appeal against the process, ultimately including the European Court of Justice as the last resort. It also ensures that free legal aid is available for persons who lack sufficient resources. This will put an end to the arbitrary deportation policy pursued by some Member States and strengthens the rule of law.
I also wish to make it clear that a maximum detention period of 18 months, which can be imposed by extending the six-month period for a further 12 months, may only be applied in extreme and exceptional cases. This is envisaged only if the person poses a threat to public security or in order to prevent the imminent risk of absconding.

Ramona Nicole Mănescu (ALDE), in writing. − (RO) The proposal for a directive, which we discussed yesterday and voted on today, approaches for the first time and directly the European immigration policy, by establishing the standards and procedures for the expulsion of immigrants illegally staying on the territory of Member States. In addition to the objective of legal harmonization of the situation of immigrants, the true challenge of this directive was to find the compromise that would comply with the human rights and the free movement of persons and, at the same time, take into consideration the need for individual and, especially, collective security.

Most Member States have experienced the phenomenon of immigration and the actions taken by their governments have varied according to the flow of immigrants. For this reason, I think Mr. Weber’s report regulates these differences between the immigration policies of the Member States, by taking into consideration the principles of every legal system and imposing common standards and procedures for implementation. Thus, I can say that I voted for this report exactly due to the integrated approach of immigration.

Measures such as the voluntary return to the country of origin, temporary detention and special attention given to the protection of unaccompanied minors, as well as access to the healthcare and education services, represent not an infringement of the European Convention on Human Rights, but, on the contrary, the proof that the European Union has taken one more step toward creating a common policy in the field of illegal immigration.

I would also like to congratulate the Council and Mr. Weber for the negotiated compromise.

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), in writing. − (NL) War, dictatorships, discrimination, natural disasters and poverty drive people from Africa and Asia to flee to Europe. For many refugees it is not a matter of choosing to improve their circumstances but purely a matter of survival. The Tampere summit in 1999 attempted to reduce the flow of refugees into a number of EU Member States. That was not done by appealing for mutual solidarity to distribute the refugees better over the territory of the EU states, but only by restricting entry to Europe at the external borders even more severely. More and more harrowing situations have occurred in recent years. Many people drown at sea, and if they reach land they are locked up for a while, forced into illegality or forcibly sent back to a country where they cannot survive.

The Weber report and the attempt to reach agreement with the Council at first reading have made the situation even worse. It is with good reason that more and more opposition to this is emerging from many quarters. If this is adopted, despite the opposition, it will be possible for people to be locked up without legal process for six months, it will be easier to deport children, and those who have been deported will be banned from travelling to the EU for 5 years, regardless of whether the situation in their country of residence has deteriorated in that time.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. − (DE) Most of the estimated 42 million refugees in 2007 were economic migrants who fell into the trap set by immigration racketeers and risked their lives to reach El Dorado. This leads not only to countless human tragedies but also places a strain on the destination countries’ social systems and clogs up the courts with hopeless asylum cases, making life even more difficult for those who might genuinely have a claim to asylum.

In the past, some Member States have attracted further millions of illegals with mass legalisations or mini-detention followed by automatic granting of leave to remain. Although the measures proposed under the Returns Directive are far too lax, they are at least a step in the right direction, especially if the proposed minimum detention period is more stringent than is currently provided for by some Member States, which is why I voted in favour of the report.

Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), in writing. − (IT) I wish to compliment my LIBE Committee colleagues on the compromise struck with the Council. This is the first time that the Union has managed to equip itself with common rules for the return of illegally staying third-country nationals. It is laudable that the aim of the directive, in laying down common, transparent return procedures, is to ensure humane treatment for those concerned and to improve cooperation both with the migrants’ national authorities and between Member States, including through the establishment of a re-entry ban, valid throughout the Union and not exceeding five years.
Voluntary return, the duration of temporary custody, with alternatives provided for certain cases, the organisation of custody facilities, the ban on collective returns, the particular treatment to be given to minors and vulnerable persons when adopting a return decision and the preservation of family unity: all of these are positive features of the proposal for a directive, as is the free legal aid, if requested, to pursue an appeal against the removal order.

I am voting in favour of this measure, in the knowledge that illegal immigration will be combated more effectively with common, transparent rules. These rules will enhance the safety of our citizens, confirming once again that when it comes to common problems, such as those related to immigration, Europe must speak with one voice and confirm that the concepts of welcome and lawful conduct are indissociable from one another.

Robert Navarro (PSE), in writing. – (FR) A majority of the European Parliament has today adopted the proposal for the Returns Directive. This proposal for a directive, which is aimed at establishing minimum common standards for the treatment of illegal immigrants, was originally intended as a response to the often tragic situation encountered in the 224 or so detention camps scattered around Europe. It is a sensible initiative, since we know that some countries have no rules or limits whatsoever for the detention of illegal aliens. During the vote in committee the Socialist members made significant progress in laying down essential guarantees on human rights, which were absent from the initial proposal. These have now been removed by the Council and the PPE rapporteur, as it appears that they prefer a more repressive package in the hope that it will discourage those who are already in a state of despair. The result is a Directive that ratifies a process for criminalising migrants, cramming them together under appalling conditions for prolonged periods on end and separating minors from their families, while the so-called guarantees of the right to legal aid and appeal will in fact be left to the discretion of the Member States. This is quite simply unacceptable and contrary to the values that Europe claims to represent. This is why I decided to vote against the text.

Dimitrios Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The conservative majority in the European Parliament has once again ignored the voice of the citizens and common sense. Adopting the ‘Directive of Shame’ in a bid to create a Fortress Europe deprives immigrants of their basic human rights and condemns them to a life of illegality. The Council’s scandalous and inhuman conciliation agreement is contrary to the existing international legal framework. The assurances of greater protection for immigrants in Europe are in complete contrast with the grim pictures of the ‘reception’ centres.

Europe cannot shield itself behind this unacceptable legislation and close the door to immigrants. The New Democracy (ND) government and its MEPs who have actively supported today’s decision are largely responsible. What Mr Karamanlis said in front of the television cameras when he visited the immigrant reception centre on the island of Samos a few days ago is belied by the actions of New Democracy.

Tobias Pflüger (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (DE) My reasons for voting against the Returns Directive are as follows:

The Directive negotiated by the EU’s Home Affairs Ministers not only establishes a possible 18-month period of detention prior to deportation for so-called ‘illegally staying third-country nationals’; it also provides for a five-year re-entry ban for refugees who have been deported. As a result of the Directive, around 8 million non-EU citizens who do not have a valid residence permit are threatened with detention and deportation to their ‘home countries’.

Furthermore, the Directive allows the detention and removal of unaccompanied minors, in clear violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are plans to deport migrants to transit countries which are not their home countries. Many procedural guarantees and legal rights for migrants to appeal against deportation have vanished from the final text, which could also put at risk the rights of those migrants who are able to apply for asylum.

In short, the Directive creates a basis for the stigmatisation and criminalisation of migrants who, without having committed any crime, will be deprived of their liberty and held in detention facilities in conditions unworthy of human dignity. The Directive erodes European and international human rights standards by further worsening living conditions for migrants. This new measure is in line with the logic of the EU Member States’ immigration and asylum policy as practised since 1990, which is notable for its permanent dismantling of migrants’ rights. Opposition to the implementation of the Directive is now required.
Lydie Polfer (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) The proposal for a directive on returning illegally staying third-country nationals is aimed at providing the European Union with a common immigration policy by laying down criteria for the maximum period of temporary custody, by favouring a voluntary return procedure and by providing for a ban on re-entry to the European Union for those who have been expelled.

The text as proposed is a compromise and like all compromises it can be improved. Thus the maximum detention period of six months, which may be extended to 12 months, is well above the maximum period of custody provided for in my country, Luxembourg (3 months).

On the other hand the document does lay down certain guarantees for families and infants, as well as specifying the conditions governing non-refoulement to the country of origin.

As this matter comes under the codecision procedure Parliament is on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers and a negative vote would lead to delays prejudicial to this highly sensitive issue.

For this reason, and in spite of certain reservations, I voted in favour of the proposal for a directive.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) An area with shared external borders and no internal borders must harmonise certain rules on the entry, movement, residence and departure of third-country nationals. A prosperous economy and a welfare state with high levels of protection – in comparison to neighbouring countries – must lay down rules and conditions for the entry of third-country nationals.

It is therefore essential to regulate and achieve a certain coherence between the rules of the various areas with a common border. This must be done bearing in mind that immigration is an asset and a benefit for the countries of destination and a potential benefit for the countries of origin, provided that it is regulated and legal. It must also be borne in mind that, when we show humanity by welcoming people who are struggling, this is a sign of civilisation on which we cannot turn our backs.

I support the essence of this report because it does not force us to reduce our guarantees, but in fact imposes them, albeit inadequately, where they are absent.

Finally, in the debate on this subject, I believe that one point has been missed. The destination of immigration, at least intra-European immigration, is changing. Given that migratory flows are one of the most revealing economic indicators, this point deserved more attention.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) It is not that I do not find the text insufficient on certain points, especially those relating to the detention of minors and health issues, but here at last, after three years of negotiations with the Council, this compromise that has been extracted from certain Member States now imposes rules on those countries that have never had any and, a crucial point, does not prohibit others from retaining their own legislation or from going further by introducing even more flexible laws.

I do not support the witch-hunt that is again today being led by some against those who are attempting to set boundaries for immigration in Europe. No, Europe is not a fortress. Nearly two million immigrants come here legally every year. No, the Directive does not impose 18 months’ detention: the general rule is six months maximum, with very strictly applied exceptions, it has to be recalled, in those nine countries that have an unlimited detention period. In Belgium, for example, the average period of detention is 22 days.

Voting ‘no’ today is the easy, headline-grabbing way out, and in this case I am convinced that it will not serve those primarily concerned, namely the migrants themselves, who have to be helped and in some cases reasoned with.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am voting in favour of Mr Weber’s report. Europe is at last beginning to address the problem of illegal immigration in a responsible, effective manner. The Returns Directive is an initial step towards a proper policy to combat the phenomenon. Illegal immigrants must be obliged to leave Europe, with all due respect for minimum standards ensuring that those concerned receive humane treatment. As we have always maintained, illegal immigration is an extremely serious problem and responsibility for handling it should be left to the individual countries. Nevertheless, the problem is often a European one, which is why all the responsibilities and costs cannot be offloaded onto certain countries, first and foremost Italy.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) The excessive detention period is one of the most important reasons for my vote. The possibility of locking up adults and even children for no less than 18 months is going too far, particularly as they are also to be taken into detention if their country of origin does not
cooperate by providing the right papers. Through no fault of their own they often cannot go back. The fact that people staying in the territory illegally can be sent back to the country they travelled through is no solution either. A re-entry ban up to a maximum of five years is incompatible with the idea that people should be given protection in Europe if they need it. This measure will also lead to illegal people trafficking and smuggling. The Union urgently needs agreements on who may come in but is now directing most of its efforts to deportation. As a result, the proposal is one-sided and very unbalanced. Agreements like this are only meaningful if they offer legal protection to people without valid documents. Unfortunately, this compromise does not offer this to a sufficient extent. I would not be doing European migration policy a service by voting for this.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. − The loss of Amendment 98 concerning the treatment of unaccompanied minors, i.e. children, and Amendment 103 on the conditions, duration and lawfulness of migrants in detention, is deeply depressing for those of us who believe in human dignity.

Daniel Strož (GUE/NGL), in writing. − (CS) In my opinion, the motion for a resolution concerning common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals is not a good text. It attempts to ‘solve’, by means of administrative and repressive methods, a serious problem that really calls for a political solution, aimed at eliminating the causes of illegal migration. The draft report presented by Mr Manfred Weber to the European Parliament in plenary contains nothing more than (more or less) cosmetic changes that do not go to the heart of the matter.

Introducing repressive measures towards so-called illegal immigrants, such as so-called temporary custody, and keeping them under the horrendous conditions that exist in some detention centres (according to the LIBE Committee) violate internationally recognised conventions for the protection of human rights.

Moreover, one fundamental problem appears in the explanatory statement, which affects the overall concept of the document. Although it offers an alternative – the possibility of granting so-called illegal immigrants legal residence permits – both the Commission’s proposal and the report to be adopted by the European Parliament are based on a single premise: that illegal immigrants must leave Europe. Taking the above facts into account, my recommendation is that the report be rejected.

Silvia-Adriana Ţicău (PSE), in writing. − (RO) The Union is built on common values and protects human rights. I voted for the amendments of the European socialists because they requested Member States to provide seriously sick persons with an autonomous residence permit or another authorization providing them with the right of residence.

This is for the purpose of benefiting from adequate access to medical care, except for the cases in which it can be proved that the given persons can benefit from adequate treatment and medical care in their own country of origin. I also consider it essential that the national of the third country in question be released immediately if the public custody is not legal. Minors under public custody should be able to participate in amusement activities, including play and recreation activities adequate for their age and have access to education.

Unaccompanied children should be provided with accommodation in institutions having the personnel and equipment adequate for the needs of people in their age category. The child’s best interest represents an essential ground in the context of taking minors under public custody while waiting for expulsion. I am sorry that these amendments were not adopted. I consider that, without these amendments, the Weber report does not comply with the European values and, for this reason, I voted against this report.

Jeffrey Titford (IND/DEM), in writing. − We voted to reject the report because we don’t want any kind of European Common Immigration Policy. We feel that it should be up to individual states to decide who is expelled from their territory and under what circumstances.

Whilst we almost never vote for any legislation, we would like to point out that we did vote in favour of Amendment 75, which rejected the Commission’s proposal for a common expulsion policy, but not for the reasons/justification given by the group which tabled the amendment. We had our own reasons for rejection. This is regardless of the fact this directive does not apply in the UK. It is the principle behind this that drove our voting decision.
Konstantinos Droutsas (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) To complete the dominance of the EU electricity and natural gas markets by large-scale capital interests, the package of five proposals for the third legislative bundle is now being prepared by the Commission. The aim is to turn a social good into a market commodity and to promote the capitalist restructuring of the energy sector through the mass privatisation of energy production and distribution.

The proposal sets up fierce competition, especially in the wholesale energy market. It makes for a complete separation of the networks (transmission systems or transmission management systems) from supply and production. Thus in principle there will be no discrimination between the public and private sectors, with the result that public corporations will lose their comparative advantages and competitors entering the market will be safeguarded.

At a time of rapidly rising international oil prices, workers are feeling the pinch; the EU is favouring the interests of capital, and safeguarding and increasing its profits.

The victims of this policy are the energy sector workers, and more generally the working classes. They will face increased prices and a decline in services, as happens wherever the energy market is privatised.

The mass mobilisation of workers and the resounding ‘no’ votes in referendums reveal growing popular outrage at this policy and open the way to its repeal.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) It is interesting to note how, in this third package for the liberalisation of the electricity sector, the same arguments are still being used, despite the fact that we have less and less control over the actions of the economic and financial groups that are operating on the market, imposing their own rules, increasing prices, dismissing workers, increasing the precariousness of employment and increasingly failing to fulfil their public service duties.

While it is true that, without an effective electricity and gas market, the European Union will have increasing difficulty in guaranteeing security of supply, sustainability of an energy market with few coal resources and global competitiveness, it is also true that this market will only be possible if there is a strong public sector.

However, what is being proposed is exactly the opposite. The call is for more liberalisation and the destruction of what remains of this public sector in some countries. Then, in a fruitless attempt to cover this up, the suggestion is made of a charter to protect consumers. We will wait to see how this is applied. In any event, the basic issue is the liberalisation of the sector, which is why we could only vote against this report in the end.

Neena Gill (PSE), in writing. – President, I spoke on the Morgan report during the debate but I did not have the opportunity to speak on amendment 159. This amendment would prohibit Member States from authorising the construction of new power stations that emit more than 350g of carbon dioxide per kilowatt hour produced. I would like to clarify the position on behalf of the EPLP who have all received a number of letters on this amendment.

Whilst we appreciate that climate change is real and present and we have an obligation to address this, we have voted against amendment 159 because it would knock out the development of all new gas-, oil- and coal-fired power stations. This would be detrimental to Europe’s security of supply and to keeping the lights on in Europe.

Robert Goebbels (PSE), in writing. – (FR) I voted against the Morgan report and the energy package because I believe that we are going down the wrong road. The proposed Agency will be yet another bureaucratic body. A network of national regulators with extended powers would be a more effective way of ensuring that small producers have access to the networks. Unbundling has become a kind of magic potion, whereas the experience of those countries that have been practising it certainly does not put the case for liberal measures of this kind. The energy market is a global market. Competition for Gazprom and the oil-producing states will come not from the biogas cooperatives but from the big European companies.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) When it voted for compulsory unbundling of ownership of energy concerns in the European Union, the European Parliament took a decisive step towards creating a common market in electrical energy. Dividing these concerns into companies responsible for energy production and companies responsible for its transmission is the only way to create an open and competitive market where there is no conflict of interest.
The consumer should be the main beneficiary of the proposed changes. The proposal adopted significantly strengthens consumers’ rights. *Inter alia,* it gives consumers the right to withdraw from a contract with an electricity supplier without additional charges. Consumers are also given the right to change their energy supplier in a very short time.

It should be borne in mind that the electricity market is currently dominated by monopolies that abuse their position on uncompetitive markets. I believe that price caps will protect energy users from exploitation by energy concerns, without deterring new entities from entering the market.

Clearly, the solutions proposed will not resolve all the problems related to energy currently confronting us, such as the rise in oil prices. Nonetheless, these solutions represent appropriate steps towards the development of a more competitive market. The debate is to continue in the Council. Unfortunately, however, it is unlikely that all of the European Parliament’s proposals will be accepted. As the rapporteur rightly pointed out, many Member States protect want to protect their own national interests.

**Jacky Hénin (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (FR) This third energy package dogmatically persists in following the course of total separation between the energy production side and the distribution networks. It is aimed at subjecting the entire energy sector solely to the laws of the free market and to everyone competing with everyone else.

As the same causes produce the same effects this will lead the European Union to an even bigger disaster than that experienced by California in the year 2000.

This policy is bad for consumers, bad for the industry’s employees, bad for SMEs and SMIs, bad for jobs, bad for security and bad for the environment. The market and the private sector are incapable of meeting the energy needs of Europeans and of responding to the challenges of global warming and the post fossil fuel era. Their prime objective is to pay out as much as possible to their shareholders, not to act in the general interests of the nation.

We need a proper internal market for energy in Europe and this will only be achieved on the basis of cooperation. The energy sector needs to be guided by coordinated public action from the Member States, not by the activities of the financial markets. The EU has to take steps to ensure that energy is recognised as a global public resource and not as just another commodity to be bought and sold.

**Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing.** – I was disappointed that my own group’s amendment on nuclear accident liability was not adopted. Nevertheless, the final Morgan report does contain much to commend it, and I welcome the addition of references to the proposed charter on energy consumers’ rights. On balance, therefore, I was able to vote in favour of the report.

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (ET) I strongly support these amendments, as these strengthen free competition in the European Union, help keep prices at reasonable levels and at the same time allow consumers to exercise their freedom to change their electricity supplier any time wished. Furthermore this boosts cross-border electricity sharing and, with that, also protects states and consumers from sudden electricity shortages. I call for fast action in this field in eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy and burdens to enable EU electricity companies to act freely throughout the Union to strengthen free competition and to empower consumers to make conscious choices.

**Roselyne Lefrançois (PSE), in writing.** – (FR) I voted against this report, which in purporting to lay down common rules for the internal market in electricity is in fact proposing to dismantle the heritage of Europe’s traditional operating networks.

Separating electricity production and electricity distribution will in my view provide no additional guarantees as to the efficiency, security or accessibility of the network, particularly in the present situation of a sustained growth in global electricity demand and major uncertainty over resources.

This latter factor calls for even greater structural investment in order to safeguard our supplies and promote research and innovation, a prospect that seems to be largely incompatible with the philosophy of strong competition and short-term profitability that underlies the decision to move towards the total deregulation of this sector.

The ‘third way’, which is supported by the French Socialists but regrettably was not adopted, appears to be a much more sensible solution since it allows us to preserve the patrimonial integrity of Europe’s large energy
groups while at the same time placing the organisation of electricity distribution in the hands of independent regulators.

Nevertheless, I welcome the progress that this report represents as far as consumer protection is concerned, particularly the introduction of rules for combating energy poverty and for ensuring transparency and accessibility to information for the end user.

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (NL) Supplying electricity is not a trade but a mains service. The service must be provided to all stakeholders without interruption and with the lowest possible impact on the environment. This requirement is inconsistent with the risks involved in international trade by competing companies. Electricity will continue to be a scarce and vulnerable product in the future too, certainly now that fossil fuels are running out and as global warming continues.

That is why it is good that in many EU Member States it is the State or local authorities that have developed the power stations and electricity grids. Privatisation of these mains services is undesirable and risky. Their sale creates new owners and a monopoly on the transmission system. That system is a non-profit-making resource between production and sale, but ownership of it can be misused to impose a high toll on consumers and any competitors. Fixing electricity prices through the stock market leads to consumer prices that are much higher than production costs.

The EU Member States are right to look at how these risks should be combated. The situation varies greatly from one Member State to another. It is best that these issues are weighed up there. I am in favour of giving the Member States the greatest possible freedom, the third way referred to in the Glante amendment, but I am against this European directive as a whole.

Lydia Schenardi (NI), in writing. – (FR) Obviously the real aim of this third energy package is not security of supply, the quality of the services being provided, price affordability or the ability of consumers freely to choose their supplier but rather the permanent dismantling of what is left of the old public electricity monopolies.

The determination being displayed by the Commission and by many Members of this House in wanting to impose ‘patrimonial separation’, in other words forcing ‘historical’ operators like EDF to give up ownership of their network, is quite unacceptable. The activities these companies are being accused of, namely restricting competitors’ access to the network and deliberately limiting investment in infrastructure projects, have never in fact been proven. Neither is it clear how entrusting control of the network to a single operator that is not the electricity supplier can guarantee an appropriate and adequate level of investment, non-abuse of a key position or better congestion management.

This is why, though we have always defended the exclusive primacy of Member States over energy affairs, which is a strategic area of too great importance to be left to the Eurocrats, we will be supporting as the lesser of two evils the ‘effective separation’ solution being proposed by, among others, France and Germany. We shall also vote against those texts whose viewpoints we fundamentally reject.

José Albino Silva Peneda (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) I could only vote in favour of this report. To say yes to all the forces for liberalisation of the electricity market is to say yes to a fairer, more competitive and more transparent market.

However, it is not only the correctness of this report, which places the consumer at the heart of the issue, that attracts me. With increasing energy prices and a lack of competition in national markets, there is a danger of increasing the number of citizens excluded from accessing energy. I therefore agree with the social concerns expressed as, for the first time, the concept of ‘fuel poverty’ has been defined, drawing attention to the importance of the Member States developing national plans which cover all citizens.

Given the current situation in the national energy markets within the EU, it is unacceptable for one company to both own the electricity network and also be responsible for the transmission of electricity, thus holding a de facto monopoly, as it can then block access to the market for new operators who, in many cases, are more competitive.

This document therefore courageously identifies the need to increase the level of transparency and competition within the energy sector, while effectively protecting the consumer from the consequences of a closed and inflexible market.
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This document therefore courageously identifies the need to increase the level of transparency and competition within the energy sector, while effectively protecting the consumer from the consequences of a closed market.


Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. − (PT) This is another part of the third package of measures to liberalise the energy markets in the European Union, following on from the recommendations adopted by the European Parliament in June 2007. The rapporteur agrees with: the inclusion of stronger and more independent powers for the regulators; increased requirements for transparency in the market; an improved framework for cooperation at European level between national regulators as well as between transmission system operators; more emphasis given to the further development of interconnection capacity between Member States, and the proposal of ownership unbundling as the most effective, but not the only, means to encourage investments and avoid discrimination towards new entrants.

In other words, the European Union forced the privatisation of a sector that is strategic to economic development and is now trying to take steps to deal with the serious problems created by the economic groups that have taken over the sector. That is why the rapporteur himself raises some questions about the voluntary implementation of the codes and rules, arguing that they should be compulsory.

However, no one is admitting that the real solution would have been to retain a strong public sector in the area of energy, which is why we voted against this report.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. − (DE) It was not only because of pressure from the Commission that E.ON and RWE sold off their transmission systems; due to the unbundling which has taken place, the strategic function of network access, namely to shut out new competitors, has largely been lost. Across Europe, there is a massive need for investment in old power plant and system infrastructure, some of which is decades old. As experience with the United Kingdom's radical rail privatisation has shown, investors have very little interest in upgrading infrastructure. It is quite possible that the new network access provisions aimed for will have the same effect. For that reason, I voted against the Vidal-Quadras report.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. − (PL) The rapporteur has prepared a very good and thorough report.

I believe that in its present form, the European Parliament's proposal will enable work on integrating the Union's market in energy to continue. I trust it will prove possible to reach agreement on all cross-border issues.

– Report: Giles Chichester (A6-0226/2008)

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. − (PT) This is yet another part of this energy package. It concerns the establishment of the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators, which fits within a global strategy, defined by the European Commission and by the Council, to liberalise and regulate the energy sector, which they have termed the 'Energy Package'.

The strategy is always the same. First they privatisation the public sector. Then problems arise and they create regulators, new bureaucracies and greater control for the major powers over what happens in each Member State.
According to the rapporteur (from the PPE-DE Group), we must go beyond the Commission’s proposals and give this Agency more independence and more decision-making powers. The imposition of standards, codes, market rules and even decisions by higher authorities, serving the interests of economic groups, is a recurrent argument. The Agency will be a supranational institution with powers in a strategic area – namely energy – which has an effect across all sectors of society.

The consequences of interference in the political strategy and economy of each Member State could be serious. In this context we reject the report.

**Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing.** – Energy markets are increasingly taking on a pan-European nature and the proposed Agency for the Co-operation of Energy Regulators will play an important role as the markets develop. The Agency should have adequate powers to achieve its tasks and I was able to support the report which ensures these powers whilst guaranteeing the independence of national regulators.

**Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing.** – (PL) The rapporteur has prepared a very good and thorough report.

I believe that in its present form, the European Parliament’s proposal will allow work on integrating the Union’s market in energy to continue. It will also enable the Agency's competences regarding all cross-border issues to be strengthened. This should result in effective cooperation between the Member States.

**– Report: Francesco Ferrari (A6-0081/2008)**

**Adam Bielan (UEN), in writing.** – (PL) The number of accidents involving pedestrians rose by 5.7% in Poland last year, and the number of accidents involving cyclists rose by a considerable 16.8%. I support the report by Mr Ferrari, and believe it is essential to increase safety requirements. Nonetheless, we should also bear in mind that the cost of doing so must not be borne primarily by vehicle owners.

I represent the Lesser Poland Voivodship, which has the lowest accident rate in the country, at 7/100. Nonetheless, there are many accident black spots as a result of excessive traffic density and inappropriate road infrastructure.

**Francesco Ferrari (ALDE), in writing.** – I consider this report another positive step forward in assisting pedestrians in the EU from the many injuries and fatalities caused by motor vehicle accidents. Indeed, 40 000 citizens die each year.

Improvements to vehicle design and improved car systems, including the pedestrian ‘crumple zone’ at the front of a car, are positive moves which need to be encouraged. Removal of bull-bars from vehicles for which they are not necessary or not intended – non-farm-working vehicles, for example, – is another instance of how the EU can be consistent as regards pedestrian-friendly enhancements.

I will support these issues in this vote and I consider it vital for pedestrians across the EU that more is done to improve the safety of pedestrians.

**Neena Gill (PSE), in writing.** – I voted for this report because I support the development of passive and active safety systems that would reduce the impact of road accidents involving pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. Although a variety of factors may be responsible for accidents (speed, human error), the vehicle itself should be adapted to minimise impact during an accident. I support the report's obligations to lay down minimum requirements for the construction and functioning of vehicles and frontal protection systems.

However, I believe what is missing from this report is the massive opportunity to cooperate with developing and emerging countries. This is because the majority of road deaths, approximately 70%, occur in developing countries. Pedestrians account for 65% of deaths and 35% of pedestrian deaths are children. A country like India alone accounts for a massive 10% of total global road accident fatalities.

The EU must exchange and share with developing countries its expertise in road accident data collection and analysis, as well as the development of active and passive safety systems. There is a strong case for technology transfer from the EU to developing countries which could reduce road accidents and their impact on road users.

**Genowefa Grabowska (PSE), in writing.** – (PL) I should like to highlight the importance of this report and congratulate the rapporteur on the outcome. It is a fact that 8 000 road users die every year in the European Union. The victims are mainly pedestrians and cyclists. A further 300 000 people are injured. This state of affairs involves personal tragedies and also has significant social and economic consequences. Accordingly,
the Union’s measures aimed at ensuring better protection for pedestrians and other vulnerable road users against injuries sustained in collisions with motor vehicles should be especially welcome.

As of October 2005 and pursuant to the provisions currently in force, certain vehicles have to pass a series of performance tests based on the recommendations of the Joint Research Centre. In addition, the Union is proposing to impose significantly stricter test requirements for motor vehicles placed on the European market after 2010. The report before us provides for linking active and passive safety measures, and anticipates the future introduction of anti-collision systems. To date, there is no effective system on the market providing for the protection of pedestrians in the case of collision, which is why the Commission is rightly encouraging industry to develop such a system. I also agree with the rapporteur that the technical possibilities of ensuring higher passive safety standards should be constantly monitored, as should possibilities relating to increased safety requirements.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing. − Every year thousands of pedestrians and cyclists across Europe are killed or injured in road accidents. European legislation has played an important part in reducing fatalities and injuries but it is important that standards are up to date. The proposals in this field are to be welcomed and I accordingly voted in favour of the Ferrari report.

Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE), in writing. − (SK) The statistics for EU road traffic accidents are alarming. It is estimated that every year as many as 8 000 vulnerable road users, pedestrians and cyclists, are killed, and 300 000 are injured. Up to 80% of road accidents happen in towns and villages where the speed limit is between 40 and 60 km/h. This indicates that not only speeding, but the quality of road infrastructure and, in particular, vehicle safety can be responsible for road accidents as well.

Calls for the use of public transport, walking and cycling as alternatives to the use of cars must be offset by measures aimed at lowering the number of injuries sustained. At the moment there are no collision avoidance systems on the market that are effectively able to identify pedestrians or other vulnerable road users in time.

I welcome, and I voted for, the report by the rapporteur, Mr Francesco Ferrari, on the proposal for a regulation on the protection of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. The European car industry’s ambition must be to sell cars that are not just technically very advanced and ecologically clean but also extremely safe.

In order to ensure a high level of safety in all circumstances, the compulsory installation of active brake assistance systems for all new vehicles as of 2009, envisaged in the Commission proposal, should not replace high-level passive safety systems, but should instead complement them.

I believe that this regulation will help to improve safety for all road users.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. − (PT) Road safety is a priority of European transport policy, a real concern for political decision-makers and a mainstay for all citizens in the fight against the tragedies which, unfortunately, keep occurring all too frequently on Europe’s roads. The Ferrari report aims to strengthen Community requirements in the area of safety and therefore to improve the safety of pedestrians. We cannot, as a result, hesitate in demanding maximum attention and the best instruments available to guarantee safety on our roads. In particular, it is vital that the legislative work continues to be as rigorous as possible and that the measures adopted are duly monitored and assessed in order to ensure that the necessary improvements are made in good time to prevent further tragedies. We welcome, in this report, the attempt to identify ways of making up for lost time and ensuring that the prevention systems proposed are the most correct and appropriate for victims of collisions with motor vehicles.

Finally, and because sometimes the devil is in the detail, our task is to ensure, even in the more technical areas, that the legislation we produce always offers the best means of protection for our citizens.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. − (IT) I am voting in favour of the report by Mr Ferrari. I agree with the aim of this proposal to strengthen Community requirements aimed at improving the safety of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users in case of injuries resulting from a collision with a motor vehicle.

I believe that it is possible from both a time and a technical point of view to make rapid headway towards designing and implementing suitable means of adapting vehicles. I applaud in particular the introduction of an obligation to equip vehicles with a Brake Assist System (BAS), which will help to reduce the number of collisions between vehicles and pedestrians.
Brian Simpson (PSE), in writing. − I welcome this report because it strengthens existing legislation and yet again attempts to improve road safety, especially in the area of cyclists’ and pedestrians’ safety. Each year 8 000 people – pedestrians and cyclists – are killed and 300 000 injured on the roads of the EU.

A great number of these casualties can be avoided either by better driver training or by improved motor vehicle design. The introduction of brake assistance systems, the introduction of higher performance tests and a quicker implementation period should all help to reduce the carnage that happens every year on our roads.

I am particularly happy to see that those killers we know as bull bars will now have to pass the same performance tests on the vehicles on which they are intended to be installed, although for me the campaign to ban bull bars outright still goes on.

I congratulate the rapporter on his report and I look forward to a speedy conclusion with the Council on this issue.

David Sumberg (PPE-DE), in writing. − I wish to explain my vote in relation to the report by Francesco Ferrari on the protection of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users.

Although I support the worthy objectives of this report, for all of us want to reduce the shocking loss of life and injuries sustained on our roads, I believe the report requires a very quick timetable for implementation and I do not consider that this can be achieved.

Some quite radical requirements are being proposed and therefore the burden on industry will be too high if the proposals are introduced too quickly.

At a time of recession, we must all remember that our constituents need to protect their jobs and too hasty legislation can often damage this objective.


At present, there are no anti-collision systems on the market capable of effectively identifying pedestrians and other vulnerable road users whilst complying with all the necessary conditions. I share the rapporteur’s view that priority should be given to the introduction of measures to reduce the number of injuries, and above all, the number of fatalities amongst pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. It should be emphasised that the amendments tabled are aimed at tightening up the provisions of the regulation wherever possible. I voted in favour of the report, because I believe that it is important to monitor not only the development of technology to ensure active safety, but also to consider the possibility of introducing stricter provisions in the area of passive safety, relating to vehicle construction.

Bernard Wojciechowski (IND/DEM), in writing. − (PL) Pedestrians and cyclists are often involved in road accidents. Protecting their lives represents a major challenge for the motor vehicle industry.

The Electronic Pedestrian Protection system (EPP) is an excellent solution. It reduces the severity of the consequences of colliding with a vehicle. Thanks to this system, the front portion of the vehicle absorbs the force of the impact, thus reducing the extent of the injuries suffered by the victim.

Another successful method of ensuring the safety of pedestrians is through an active vehicle bonnet, which has been installed in the C6. At the moment the pedestrian is hit, the engine cover automatically rises. Thanks to an impact detection sensor and a detonating mechanism, the bonnet rises by 65 millimetres in 0.40 seconds. A separate mechanism keeps the bonnet in a raised position despite the force of the impact, thus absorbing the energy created. In the case of a slight impact, protection is also provided by a part fitted with a shock absorber.

All vehicles should undergo as many tests as necessary in the interests of improving safety on the European Union’s roads.


Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. − (PT) This report concerns some positive changes to the usual procedure between the European Commission and the European Parliament. Article 5a of amended Decision 1999/468/EC introduced the new regulatory procedure with scrutiny for measures of a general
scope which seek to amend non-essential elements of a basic instrument adopted in accordance with Article 251 of the Treaty, inter alia by deleting some of those elements or by supplementing the instrument by the addition of new non-essential elements.

Following the screening of the existing legislation and on-going procedures, the European Commission presented this proposal covering 59 legislative acts to be adapted to the new regulatory procedure with scrutiny.

In its decision of 12 December 2007, the Conference of Presidents designated the Committee on Legal Affairs as the lead committee to deal with this comitology alignment and the specialised committees as opinion-giving committees. The Conference of Committee Chairs agreed on 15 January 2008 on the modalities of cooperation between the Committee on Legal Affairs and the other committees involved. This report therefore contains a limited number of amendments that were suggested by other committees in their opinions, received in the form of letters.


Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I voted in favour of the report by Mr Galeote Quecedo on a proposal for a Council regulation opening and providing for the administration of autonomous Community tariff quotas on imports of certain fisheries products into the Canary Islands.

The report advocates lifting the common customs tariff on the import of certain fisheries products to the Canary Islands for the years 2007-2013. It should be noted that the provisions affected by the proposal expired on 31 December 2006. The proposal concerning the establishment of tariff-free quotas and the provisions for managing the latter complies with Article 299(2) of the Treaty on European Union, which provides for specific measures to assist the outermost regions.

I therefore voted in favour of this report, as I consider that the exceptional geographical situation of the Canary Islands in relation to the sources of supply of certain fishery products, which are essential for domestic consumption, entails additional costs for this sector. One way of remedying natural difficulties of this type, due to geographical location, is to temporarily suspend duties on imports of the products in question from third countries.


Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of the Jäätteenmäki report on the statute of the European Ombudsman.

As a member of the European Parliament’s Committee on Petitions, I have seen for myself that an enormous, and growing, number of citizens are turning to the Community institutions to appeal against the failure of Member States to comply with EU rules.

Very often the petitions submitted to Parliament, and examined by the committee responsible, cannot be deemed admissible. Here I would take up one key point: the office of the European Ombudsman must work harder and better on its external communications with citizens. Very often the ordinary person is unaware even of the existence of the Ombudsman, potentially a means of creating a more functional and efficient link with the EU institutions. The statute on which we are voting today sets out new mechanisms to bolster the effectiveness of the Ombudsman’s work. It will be up to us MEPs to monitor the outcomes.

Lydie Polfer (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) I support the own-initiative report by Mrs Jäätteenmäki on the European Ombudsman’s access to information, and the need for a clearer set of regulations, as it seeks to lay down more precise rules in this area.

According to the text the various bodies and institutions of the European Union must supply the Ombudsman with all the information asked for, whereas until now a document could be refused on the pretext of confidentiality.

Similarly, the obligation on officials to provide testimony ‘pursuant to instructions from their administrations’ is to be removed, while the official in question is to be required to tell the truth in all honesty.

Mrs Jäätteenmäki’s proposals are aimed at strengthening the public’s confidence in the activities of the European Ombudsman and as such they are worthy of implementation.
8. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 1.30 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE
Vice-President

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

10. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

11. Measures to combat the rise in oil prices (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on statements by the Council and the Commission on measures to control the increase in oil prices.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) The Council is aware of the impact of rising prices on European citizens, and their negative effect on the entire European economy. For this reason, the Council has addressed this matter in its recent meetings. In the context of high food prices, the issue will be discussed also by Heads of State and Government during their meeting beginning tomorrow. Analyses of the reasons for high oil prices indicate complex structural shifts in oil supply and demand in the global economy. Oil production in the short term is unlikely to keep pace with the sustained strong demand of developing economies. As the reasons for high oil prices were well presented by the European Commission in its report last week, I will not discuss them in detail.

The European Union experiences the impacts of such change in oil prices through higher inflation, higher household bills, problems in the agricultural and fisheries sectors, in the field of transport and in various industries. Based on the assumption that the reasons for the rise in oil prices are of a structural nature and that such trend are likely to continue into the future, the Union needs to find long term solutions. In tandem with encouraging competitiveness in energy markets and better transparency of oil markets, measures need to focus particularly on further support for energy efficiency and diversification of energy supply.

As regards energy efficiency, allow me to recall that the March 2007 European Council called for an increase in energy efficiency so as to achieve the objective of 20% savings by 2020. The Energy End-use Efficiency and Energy Services Directive adopted in 2006 has contributed to achieving this aim. But we cannot achieve everything through legislation. Households and businesses could make a significant contribution by behaving more rationally, which the Council and the Parliament could encourage with ongoing awareness-raising.

The other crucial measure refers to the efforts for diversification of energy supply. May I recall that in this connection the spring European Council last year adopted the Energy Policy for Europe action plan. This sets a binding target of a 20% share of renewable energies in overall EU energy consumption by 2020. I mention all this because I wish to underline that the Union has already adopted some measures which could reduce the sensitivity of the European economy to a surge in oil prices. Current policies will have to be upgraded in future.

When discussing the rise in oil prices at its recent meeting, the ECOFIN Council, inter alia, reiterated the Manchester agreement adopted in September 2005. According to this agreement, fiscal and other policy interventions should be avoided when responding to high oil prices, as they distort competition and prevent the necessary adjustment by economic agents. Measures that can be considered to alleviate the impact of high oil prices on poorer sections of the population should remain short-term and targeted, and should avoid distorting effects. Rising fuel prices were also discussed last week by the G8 finance ministers representing the most developed countries. They stressed, inter alia, that increased prices of oil and food are a global problem, and that solutions should therefore be sought at the international level.

I would also like to mention that at the meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council this week, this Monday, we approved the 18-month programme of the three upcoming Presidencies. Their work in the Council will include many tasks focused on tackling the issue of high food and oil prices efficiently.

Allow me to conclude by saying that in order to tackle the above-mentioned challenges we need coordinated policies, within the EU and at the international level. We need to be careful not to create new imbalances...
and problems with these policies. In further tackling these burning issues, we also look forward to the constructive collaboration of the European Parliament, in particular when discussing the necessary legislative proposals.

**Andris Piebalgs, Member of the Commission.** – Madam President, for me each day starts with a routine check of oil prices, and in recent times the news has been more or less in one direction: oil prices are getting higher and higher. Over the last three years, prices for oil in US dollars have more than tripled. For the EU, with a 37% share in energy consumption coming from oil, it is easy to understand the actual and potential impact of the high oil prices on our economies and citizens.

We have a constant decrease in our own production – and it is still substantial – but we have this decrease since the late 1990s. A continuing increase in imports consequently makes our oil dependency high and the amount that we are paying for buying energy resources is increasing all the time.

This has a direct effect on our citizens and businesses. Increased oil prices create inflation and that impact can be noticed already. The contribution of energy to the increase in the price index in the fourth quarter of 2007 averaged 0.8% in the euro area. This means direct, tangible impacts on households and on a lot of economic sectors, not least those who cannot pass on the price of energy to the final consumer.

The increase in prices of motor and heating fuels for households between April 2007 and April 2008 exceeded by far the overall growth of consumer prices. As an example, the prices of transport fuels rose on average by 12.7% as opposed to the inflation average of 3.6%. Our most vulnerable citizens are again amongst those most affected.

Back in September 2005, I was already talking to you about rising oil prices and I presented a five-point plan. Since then we have been working out a whole series of new proposals to begin to reply to the challenge of high and growing oil prices: on energy efficiency, on cars, on fuel quality, on renewable energy. As a result of these policies, we can expect a gradual decrease in oil consumption in the EU over the coming years. We now have roughly more or less stable consumption in the last three years and the beginning of the switch to cleaner, more efficient transport that uses renewable energy sources.

Whilst more needs to be done, and certainly we should not underestimate the problems resulting from high energy prices for our citizens, particularly the most vulnerable households as well as many businesses, this already provides a good basis on which to further develop the best possible policy response to the challenge. Indeed, the fact that oil prices have continued to rise does not mean that our policies have failed. I am convinced that without our ambitious climate and energy goals the situation would be even more difficult. But it is clear from the latest trends that we need to further step up our efforts.

So let me now consider the long-term factors affecting the oil market. Put simply, we are leaving the era of cheap oil, and cheap energy in general. Global energy demand is growing and the International Energy Agency estimates that it could increase by more than 50% by 2030. In particular, emerging economies are consuming more and more energy.

On the other hand, it is far from clear whether there will be sufficient oil production to satisfy global demand. Experts say that geologically there are still enough resources underground for the next 40-50 years. As the International Energy Agency has stated, it is far from certain whether the producing countries have the ability or willingness to step up production to meet seemingly inevitable and long-term continued increases in global oil demand.

The era of cheap energy is over, at a time when in any event we have an absolute obligation to future generations to move to clean, carbon-free energy sources for heat, power and transport due to climate change. This is the challenge facing us. This requires a clear response. But, before coming to the long-term and medium-term measures, I would like to mention some short-term steps alleviating the impact on consumers.

The effects on the most vulnerable groups must be mitigated in the shorter term, where necessary through social measures. Support to the poorest households can be justified and needed, but needs to be targeted. At the same time we should be very cautious as regards changes in the taxation regime. Experience has shown that such measures, whilst in many ways politically very attractive, in fact only make the longer-term transition to dealing with high energy prices and saving carbon more difficult. It is far better to target help where it is really most needed.

In terms of further developing the EU’s long-term approach to meeting the challenge, our existing energy policies are viewed by many as a ‘world leader’. The Commission has always insisted that its recent climate
and energy package had the combined objectives of sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness, a fact becoming clearer by the day.

Let me recall in more detail the most important elements of these policies, already in place or under examination in this House: the draft directive guaranteeing 20% renewables in our final energy consumption by 2020; the new rules to expand and strengthen the EU’s Emissions Trading System (ETS), ensuring that we meet our target of a 20% greenhouse gas reduction by 2020 and establishing the ETS as driver for change; the proposal for reducing CO₂ emissions from cars and the Fuel Quality Directive that will oblige oil suppliers to progressively reduce their CO₂ and energy consumption in the products they sell; and, most importantly, the Energy Efficiency Action Plan, covering all sectors, at all levels, from the International Partnership for Energy Efficiency Cooperation to the Covenant of Mayors at the local level, to specific measures such as labelling of consumer goods or requirements for the energy efficiency of buildings.

Practically all the measures mentioned in the Energy Efficiency Action Plan are cost effective at USD 60 per barrel of oil.

This represents a start, but we need to do more. The Commission will therefore continue the work at international level, notably constructive dialogue between the main oil-producing and consuming countries, such as the Jeddah meeting which will be convened this week in Saudi Arabia, or the EU-OPEC dialogue next week. It will scrutinise the functioning of the oil and petroleum markets in the European Union and make suggestions for possible further policy action in the second Strategic Energy Review later this year. It will assist oil-importing developing countries to mitigate short-term impacts of high fuel and food prices and to bring about structural improvements in their energy efficiency performance and the use of alternatives fuels. It will lead efforts in an increased drive for energy efficiency.

This will remain my highest priority. This means better legislation internally in the EU. It also means pushing for a more effective international energy efficiency partnership, which was adopted last week at the G8 Energy Ministerial in Japan on the initiative of the European Union.

The existing legislation on energy efficiency and the improvements that I will table over the coming months on buildings, labelling and minimum product standards are truly important, but have to be seen as only one of many measures needed. The real challenge is the effective implementation of energy efficiency policies at national, regional and local level throughout the European Union. The Commission will play a greater role in assisting Member States in meeting this challenge.

I shall mention biofuels, because this issue is often discussed. In the Draft Renewables Directive we translate the commitment of the European Council to ensure that 10% of EU transport is powered by renewable fuel by 2020 into practice. It should be noted that this 10% can be covered by biofuels or electricity from renewable sources, or by increasing energy efficiency in the transport fleet.

I am convinced that the EU can and must generate the biofuels that it uses in a sustainable and responsible manner and not affect global food-production levels. This can be done in a sustainable way by using previous set-aside land in the EU, improving land yields in a sustainable way, investing in technology for second generation biofuels, and working together with developing countries to ensure that biofuels complement food production and not replace it. With such an approach, the development of alternative clean transport fuels must be part of the EU’s response to the challenges of oil prices and climate change.

The European Union will need to continue its international efforts and its dialogue with its main partners. The G8 last week and the Jeddah meeting on oil prices this weekend show that the issue tops the political agenda. We should use the credibility we are building and lead international action to exploit energy efficiency potentials and clean energy production around the globe, and enable the functioning of global efficient and trustworthy commodity markets.

However, action starts at home, and a renewed push for renewable energy and energy efficiency is beneficial not only for the climate but also for our economy.

There is an energy future for all of us. This future will most likely be organised around different patterns of production, consumption and behaviour. As with climate change, action is needed now and the Commission is fully involved in this.

Jean-Pierre Audy, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (FR) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner Piebalgs, ladies and gentlemen, let us show some imagination. All the ideas that seek
to limit the maximum rate of VAT, including that proposed by President Sarkozy of France, are worthy enough and should be investigated, and I would like to put forward one of my own.

Oil is a fossil fuel with a limited life-span and high oil prices are an irreversible and long-term trend. However, what is causing all the problems, apart from the price hike itself, is the sudden and dramatic way in which huge fluctuations in the global price per barrel of crude oil are affecting our economies. I therefore wonder whether the European Union, without concealing the realities associated with the actual price increase, could not ensure price stability according to an annual cycle so that public budget departments, and especially those run by Member States for their tax systems and those established at local government level, along with companies and businesses that are engaged in contractual relationships tied to the price of oil and, more generally, the ordinary citizens who have to draw up their family budgets could all be better prepared for the major changes taking place in the energy sector without suffering the daily pressures that come from the sudden fluctuations in oil prices that stem from global exchange rates, speculation and the euro/dollar parity.

It is against this backdrop, Commissioner, that I propose examining the possibility of creating a Community instrument whose aim would be to guarantee the price of crude oil per barrel in accordance with the generally accepted budget cycle of one year. Such an instrument could use the financial technique of buying and selling options on the world market and would prove useful as a way to combat speculation.

In 2005, when the price was 50 dollars a barrel, I asked you for your opinion on the subject, Commissioner Piebalgs, and you replied that this idea was interesting, considering that the Commission did not have the power to control crude oil prices, particularly since the oil market is a global one. I must however be insistent on this point, because such a Community instrument, which would operate as a zero sum game in the long term and require practically no financing whatsoever, would at the very least warrant investigation, not – I repeat – as a means for opposing the laws of the free market to which we are subjected but as a way to control the suddenness with which they are imposed on us and to reduce the impact that increased oil prices have all along the price chain in the sectors concerned. The situation in the fisheries industry, which we will be debating in a moment, is a significant case in point.

Hannes Swoboda, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (DE) Madam President, I have great respect on a personal level for the two speakers from the Council and the Commission. However, I think that the proposals which we have heard today and over recent days are too little, too late. For example, the Commission’s paper makes no mention at all of the word ‘speculation’. It is not that this is the main cause of the price increases, but to publish a paper today which makes no mention of speculation at all: even the G8 is more progressive than the Commission here!

As regards the substantial profits which, naturally, are also not mentioned, I have appealed to the Commissioner several times and, given that there is apparently no way of introducing control mechanisms, I have asked him at least to ensure, by means of voluntary agreements, that some of these profits are invested in energy-saving measures, the development of alternative energies, and research. This is currently being discussed in France, for example. However, the Commissioner has made no comment about that today, and nothing is being done.

On the issue of energy saving and consumer protection, we support this in principle, but the Commission’s proposals were very weak. It took this Parliament and the decision today, in the context of the Morgan report, to bring about a substantial expansion of consumer rights here, especially in relation to energy saving with smart meters etc. As to the social measures which the Commissioner has proposed: all I can say is that it has been apparent for some time that social measures are required.

We have been discussing Ireland today. Let me be frank: what makes citizens very nervous is when they get no feedback from Brussels about their specific and real concerns. Whether the citizens concerned are fishermen in the SME sector or socially disadvantaged consumers, they want to get some kind of message from Brussels which helps them cope with their difficult situation. We are expecting some clear signals from the Commission and the Council here, especially in the next few days.

Marco Cappato, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I do not believe that we should go down the road proposed by Mr Audy. I do not believe that it is our job to lay down price control measures. The Commissioner has set out an approach to which the European Union should devote itself, namely that of our model of development, consisting of renewable energy and, at most, the urgent need to review the targets set – 20% on energy; 10% on transport – to make them even more ambitious and to tackle them within an even shorter timeframe.
Unfortunately, as is evident for example from the gas policies on which we have voted today, it is the national governments which are opposed to a genuine European policy of competition and a mix of energy sources. This is the problem. The question of speculation obviously needs to be addressed. In truth, here as elsewhere, the national governments are refusing to relinquish any real regulatory power over financial markets to the European Union, but at this stage let us not ask Europe to find shortcuts to sort out the damage done by national policies. Renewable energy and long-term strategic planning: that is what we call for, and more rapidly than previously intended.

Claude Turmes, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FR) Madam President, I wish to propose three measures.

First of all, put a tax on speculation. It is unbelievable. We are weighed down by costs while the profits being made by Total, Eon, Exxon and the speculators have never been bigger. I personally would like to see Mr Juncker, President of the Ecofin Eurogroup, turning words into deeds. We can very easily tax these profits at national level and then coordinate this Europe-wide, and it is this revenue, which will amount to millions of euros, which is the focus of my second point.

Secondly, each country will use this revenue to create a fund that will provide compensation for those in dire straits, such as fishermen, truck drivers and a large number of households that are now finding it difficult to pay the bills; not by subsidising energy directly but by helping those concerned to find the money to pay for it, and more especially by linking this to energy efficiency. It is the less well-off in our society who do not have the money to buy refrigerators that are more energy efficient. This is where we need to intervene.

Thirdly, as political movers and shakers we have to be frank with the people we represent. The current emergency is not a minor political difficulty over oil. It is a structural crisis. We have an economic model that has been developed for 1 billion people in the middle classes of the United States, Japan and Europe. This economic model is now being extended to millions of people from the middle classes in China, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Mexico and Brazil. The inherent problem with this model is that it does not incorporate resources and environmental pollution. I therefore say to you, Commissioner, that we have to be more ambitious where energy efficiency is concerned and the question that I wish to address to you is as follows: should the Council not ask the Commission to propose an entire package of measures in September aimed at a major European initiative for investment in energy efficiency?

Gintaras Didžiokas, on behalf of the UEN Group. – (LT) EU policy on the taxation of energy products was introduced in 1993. At that time the price of a barrel of oil was USD 16. Today, when the price of oil has reached USD 140, the question arises whether the current EU policy on the taxation of energy products can be justified. Citizens and businesses in the EU are paying much more for fuel than those in other parts of the world.

This is because, on top of VAT, they are paying excise duty, in which the EU is actually calling for a further increase; we are facing a truly paradoxical situation – the more expensive fuel becomes, the more money governments take from their citizens. The wave of strikes that has swept across Europe is a clear demonstration of the growing dissatisfaction of its people with the situation, in which no measures are being taken at EU level. This is a very clear signal indeed. Can we possibly fail to notice it or ignore it?

Do the Commission and the Council not think it is high time for EU policy on the taxation of energy products to be reviewed, especially with regard to excise duty. VAT and import duty? How can the Commission justify the strict message it is sending out to people, to the extent that they should learn to live with continuously increasing fuel prices? Has the Commission considered the possibility that the continuously growing fuel prices could undermine citizens’ trust in the EU, as the latter seems to be interfering with their countries’ governments’ attempts to take drastic measures? The facts underlying the excuses for failing or being unwilling to do anything as far as taxation is concerned are beneath any criticism.

The opinion that, with reduced taxes, the situation would not improve or would even decline is not a valid argument. Globally, oil and petroleum products are being purchased not only by European countries. There is no such thing as oil that is for Europe or not for Europe. We have global oil prices; it is simply that Europe imposes higher taxes on petroleum products, which is weighing heavily on the shoulders of its citizens. Import duties are limiting competition.

Perhaps changes in taxation policy would not solve all the problems, but they would enable us to react more quickly to market developments and would make it easier to survive hard times. Is that not important enough? No doubt we need other long-term measures; I welcome the introduction of these measures, only we need decisive action. EU citizens do not need fine words. What they need is the right decisions that allow a quick
response to any problems that might arise. The taxation policy, especially VAT policy, was not God-given; it needs to be changed when it is no longer in line with the current situation.

Dimitrios Papadimoulis, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (EL) Forgive me, Madam President, but the positions taken by the Council and the Commission were disappointing. There was nothing but words and not a hint of concrete measures. Do not be surprised, then, at the ‘no’ vote in the referendums in Ireland, France and the Netherlands. Do not be surprised that in countries like Belgium, where demonstrations rarely happen, thousands of people are up in arms.

Neither the President-in-Office of the Council nor the Commissioner has mentioned profiteering. What shall we do about profiteering? Why do you not impose taxes? Why not propose EU-coordinated national taxation with part of the revenue going towards supporting renewable sources of energy, clean energy, and energy-saving programmes?

Furthermore, ladies and gentlemen of the Commission and the Council, the rise in oil prices benefits state funds because the taxes collected by the Member States rise correspondingly. Thus the poorest social strata are worst hit by inflation and high prices. Inflation for the poor is 40–50% higher than the general inflation index. Part of the increased tax revenue of the Member States should therefore be given as direct aid to the most vulnerable strata of society. We must take action, not merely indulge in rhetoric.

In your concluding speeches, I expect you to explain to us why you have been quick to reject proposals submitted by right-wing governments, such as that of Mr Sarkozy, and not by left-wing governments. Do you think Mr Sarkozy is too much of a Communist? If anything is to come of this crisis of speculation in food and oil prices, it is that blinkered neoliberalism has had its day. We are waiting for you to grasp this too.

Pervenche Berès (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, we are opening today’s debate on the basis of a communication that is in fact a contingency note from the Commission that has been converted into a communication as a result of the turmoil in public opinion created by the reality of situation that Europeans have to live through day after day.

The G8 raised the question of speculation in the oil markets. We know only too well the true situation that we are currently faced with, if we really want to get to the bottom of it, and Claude Turmes touched on this. The oil crisis that we are debating and that is causing such distress to our citizens is one of the elements, one of the signs of the second age of globalisation that we have now entered, an age in which the global imbalances that are now upon us, and have left us powerless, have upset the system, and the first manifestation of this was the financial crisis in the United States, which spread at remarkable speed to our own markets and went on to disrupt the speculative bubble, thereby ravaging the property markets and then moving on to the commodities market, impacting in particular on oil prices and on food prices too. The existing balance between supply and demand in this specific market then did the rest.

Faced with this situation the European Union quite correctly anticipated events last year by drawing up a strategy that I would describe as the four-20 strategy for 2020: 20% less energy consumption, 20% more energy efficiency and 20% more renewables.

However, as always we find the same shortcomings just beneath the surface. In setting up the single market we forget that if such an internal market is to be acceptable it also has to have a social dimension. In wanting to create a single European market for goods and services we forget that perhaps we should take account of the social realities in the Member States, and when we seek to provide the European Union with a proper long-term strategy for energy we forget that this will come at a transition cost, to use the language of the economists, and that when asked what category of consumer will be most affected we can reply that it will be those from the less well-off sections of the community, those who are hit hardest by the increase in fuel prices.

There are several categories that are frequently mentioned today, those professions that are the most exposed in terms of their everyday working life, such as the fishermen and the road hauliers, but behind them there are also all those low-income households who are the first to suffer as far as their daily budget is concerned because for these families housing costs and transport costs are immediately affected by the increase in fuel charges, and when seen in proportion this affects them far more than it does the pockets of the speculators who are raking in the income from the increased oil prices.
Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – (SL) The rapidly rising fuel costs are halting transport around Europe and across the world. Hauliers are demonstrating angrily, fishermen are demanding compensation, and transport is getting increasingly expensive. The costs are literally halting the transport of goods. The most horrifying thing is that alongside these prices, oil production costs are actually minimal. Production costs are literally negligible.

Personal transport is the essence of the free movement of people and is a precondition for the free movement of goods. The fuel costs pose a drastic threat primarily to air transport, which is most vulnerable to costs. This applies especially to budget carriers, which have enabled new groups of citizens to discover Europe and the world. The crisis for the budget carriers, which could hit us this autumn, will not just affect tourism, it will affect the aviation industry, the financial industry and consequently the entire economy.

In such circumstances the European Union must show that it understands the challenges and that it is responding to them on the operational level. In these circumstances, through adequately coordinated action we can enhance the standing of European Union institutions and calm the situation in the markets. A time of financial and economic crisis is an opportunity for the European Union to prove itself as a useful, necessary and effective framework for our economies, and in particular that European institutions are the right and effective tool for our economies.

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE). – Madam President, high oil and gas prices are here to stay and I doubt very much whether we will see the price much below USD 80 per barrel ever again. The West was caught on the hop and underestimated the rise in Chinese and Indian consumption, the under-investment in exploration and extraction technologies, the inability – or unwillingness, perhaps – of Saudi Arabia to turn on its taps as a swing producer, and the geopolitical risks of countries like Venezuela, Nigeria or Iraq.

What is the answer, in my view? We must, of course, consume less, invest in renewables and new technologies like hydrogen-fuel-cell cars and look at whether biofuels, in terms of their overall effect, are good or bad in terms of global emissions and in food inflation for the developing world.

Those in this House, particularly on the Left, who believe it is all down to speculation are wrong, as you cannot hoard physical oil in large quantities as a speculator and take delivery. Only the United States of America has the facility to do that.

Lastly, I welcome Italy’s decision to build a nuclear reactor, which I hope other EU Member States will follow.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) We will have to come to terms with oil prices remaining high in the long term. The European Union and the Member States must prepare for all eventualities. As Commissioner Piebalgs said, we must invest a great deal more in developing low-consumption, environmentally friendly technologies, in renewable energies and in establishing biogas plants, as stated in the report I produced as rapporteur. Focused efforts to save energy are also important, including improving domestic insulation, for example. We have no magic solutions, and we cannot hold energy back at our borders; at the same time, however, we must also look for solutions in the short term. I would like to ask the European Commission to permit Member States, including Hungary, to reduce excise duty on diesel temporarily, because the United States has an enormous competitive advantage in this regard. Thank you for your attention.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) A genuine solution to the problem can undoubtedly be achieved only by long-term measures. However, some might not be able to survive long enough to see the results of these measures. As for short-term measures, the only proposal has been aid for poor families. However, if trade, the transport system, fisheries, small- and medium-sized enterprises and agriculture go bankrupt, short-term measures would be necessary for a great many people.

Excise duty was introduced for fuel, mineral oil, in 1992. In 2004 tax was applied to the entire energy system. Does this mean that taxation has no influence at all? Taxation has a huge impact and in my opinion it is very important to allow a reduction in excise duty until long-term measures have been implemented.

One more thing – there was no mention of hydrogen as a new (or renewable) resource. China and Canada are known for using it to power cars and Japan uses hydrogen to heat buildings.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Given the rocketing fuel prices and bearing in mind their devastating effects on people and business, transport, fisheries, agriculture and industry, it cannot be forgotten that the big oil companies have seen a massive increase in their profits, basically as a result of the practice of price speculation which is based on the speculative valuation of cheaply acquired oil stocks.
Given these events, measures are needed to combat this scandalous speculation, in particular the proposal that we have tabled to introduce a tax in each Member State which will solely apply to the speculative gains made from the stock effect and which will turn these into state revenue. This revenue must then be distributed among the economic sectors most affected in each Member State.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, Europe and the entire world now find themselves in a situation where oil prices can determine not only economic growth, but also the depth of the crisis that is beginning to be felt in the market in food and in the fisheries sector. Problems in the transport sector are likely to arise very soon.

What action is called for? In the long term, a stable widely understood energy policy should be developed. There has been much debate on the subject in the Union and in this House. In the short term, aid should be directed at specific sectors. By way of example I could mention targeted aid for farmers, fishermen and hauliers. The aid should be made available as early as the second half of this year. I must emphasise that I am referring to targeted specific aid at a specific time of year. Action to limit speculation and monopolistic practices should be taken too.

Finally, we should recognise that a review of taxation policy is needed, both at Union level and at the level of individual Member States.

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – (PT) I want to congratulate the Commissioner on his statements stressing the importance of nuclear energy and its absolute transparency.

The numbers are not deceiving: oil and gas prices will continue to rise; the pressure created by the world’s consumption of energy will continue to build; our own energy needs will continue to develop, and yet, at the same time, we cannot fail to meet our responsibilities, in particular the urgent need to combat CO₂ emissions.

As a result, nuclear energy must be on the agenda and we cannot avoid this. We cannot rule out any significant source of energy from the energy mix, particularly where this is clean and safe. Obviously we need renewables, but that is not enough. Yes, we need energy efficiency, but that is not enough. Yes, we need good biofuels, but that is not enough.

We must therefore make a choice: either nuclear energy is bad and must be banned or, if it is not banned because it is safe and because the technology and science have advanced, everyone must benefit from its production.

What we must have is vision for the future or we will end up going from bad to worse and from worse to total disaster.

Theodor Dumitru Stolojan (PPE-DE). – (RO) The effects of the oil and natural gas price increases are already felt in all the economic activities, as well as in social programmes and will reach their maximum levels next winter. With good reason, the European Commission discusses about structural solutions aiming at saving and diversifying energy. Nevertheless, we need fundamental changes in the European economy; in fact, we are discussing a new technological structure of the European structure, which has to be obtained in the medium and long term. For this reason, I think that the European Commission needs to review and re-examine the financial prediction for 2007-2013 in order to increase the efforts for new technologies and investments in the field of energy.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) I mentioned in my opening speech the findings of the competent bodies that the reasons for the higher oil prices are structural in nature. This is an important finding.

In this debate the influence of speculation has been mentioned several times. I do not wish either to deny this or minimise it, but I would stress that speculation in itself does not lead to higher energy prices, unless structural reasons are provided for this. And they have been provided. This demands longer-term measures.

The time of cheap energy, at least that from fossil sources, is probably over for some time, probably for a long time. This in turn demands long-term action from the European Union, which I have already mentioned and which would pursue two directions. Firstly, increasing energy efficiency and in this way reducing our consumption, among other things. In turn this reduces the dependence of Europe and the European economy on imported energy from fossil sources. Secondly, diversification, and especially a move towards renewable energy sources. Here I agree with Mr Papadimoulis, that more needs to be invested in renewable energy
sources, but greater investment is being encouraged precisely by higher fossil fuel prices of. If those prices become cheap again, if we make them cheap through some sleight of hand, we will reduce the motivation to finance and invest in renewable sources.

Irrespective of the fact there is broad consensus on the need for long-term measures, we cannot of course forget the short-term problems we are facing. They have been mentioned, and I would reiterate them once here. High energy prices are a particular problem for the poorer strata in our Union, they are a particular problem for fishermen – and a debate on this will be held in the next item on the agenda – and they are a particular problem for hauliers. Here of course it makes sense to study, consider and adopt appropriate measures.

Among these measures we would of course not rule out revising taxation in the European Union. I can say that the Council will express the expectation here that it will receive presently from the European Commission proposals on this issue, the taxation of energy products.

 Permit me to conclude with the following thought. I think that this debate is being held at a highly appropriate time, the day before the start of the European Council meeting, at which one of the main points of discussion will be high oil prices.

**Andris Piebalgs, Member of the Commission.** – Madam President, it has been a fascinating debate and I am very sorry that the time has passed so quickly.

As my job requires, I have been to the places where oil is being produced: the Caspian Sea, the Barents Sea, Saudi Arabia. I think one mistake we make is thinking that it is easy to produce. It costs billions, and in very difficult environments. Costs overrun, there is local damage to the environment and people are unhappy about a lot of projects. So it is very clear that, if we speak about oil issues, we should not be looking for those responsible but should try to find the appropriate responses in the European Union. If we believe that this same approach would help everybody, we should follow it.

There are no magical measures. Energy efficiency is the number one measure. Without this, the world will have much higher prices. It is very clear.

(Interjections from the floor)

Well, we are doing quite a lot. Renewable energy and also alternative energy sources like nuclear are important also to alleviate the problem. New technology investment is needed, and for the sectors it is important to address structural measures, not just subsidies: subsidy is taking from one pocket to put into another pocket. For example, regarding tonight’s fisheries debate, I would ask why fishermen cannot pass increased fuel prices on to the price of fish, because that is the basic question: what happens, what prevents it? This means that we should address sectoral measures.

On a global level I believe that it is very clear what we are trying to do, to try to remove the OPEC policy of capping supplies to the market, of not allowing, in many cases, Western companies to come with technology and knowledge to produce oil and thus create better supply. For developed nations we should lead the way in energy efficiency, and my proposal for international partnership has been adopted by the G8. But, as everybody expected oil prices to come down to USD 9 per barrel, the world was late, and now we know that we should follow this policy.

Concerning consumer protection, I believe that the Commission has always been very consistent on this. I have a lot of infringement cases where countries have not even informed the Commission, as is their duty, about public service obligations, meaning that legal documents adopted after the Commission proposal have all the necessary elements in them, and they should be implemented.

I believe that the Commission’s response and the Council’s response is measured and right. Each place in the market has its role. I know that nobody likes to defend speculators, but what is the future market’s role? It indicates where the price could go and allows investments to be made. Well, I could say, ‘Let’s tax everybody higher’ – we can increase tax to 100% for everybody, but it will mean that we lose the incentive to invest. Let us instead make the incentive to invest, let us allow positive ways to investment to be made. So that is what we need.

(Interjections from the floor)
Whether it is the companies of Saudi Arabia, Saudi Aramco, that we should tax, or Gazprom, we cannot tax them because they have national legislation on taxation. Concerning European companies, we do not have any company nowadays that has a huge windfall profit because of oil and gas.

(Interjections from the floor)

They also needed to invest in other projects as well, and if you know these companies, you should indicate them. If you know these companies that have such a beautiful life...

(Interjections from the floor)

E.ON does not work in oil. Eni works in oil but invests billions in projects, for example for South Stream, for the projects in Kashagan – they invest billions – and Libya. Each company has a role in the market.

Madam President, this is a fantastic debate. I am glad that we will have the possibility to come back to this debate, because there are no simple answers. But I believe our proposal is measured and it is the right one.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Article 142)

Ivo Belet (PPE-DE), in writing. – (NL) The high price of oil is making us all suffer, but the most vulnerable population groups on low incomes are certainly being badly hit. The European summit must send out a strong signal tomorrow that measures for the weakest in society really are justified and necessary.

A reduction in VAT or excise duty is not an immediately obvious solution, which is understandable, as it might encourage the oil producers to charge even higher prices.

Perhaps, however, we could do it differently. Perhaps we should go for a shift in duties, so that air tickets specifically are made a bit more expensive (from the autumn for instance), by means of a levy, and the proceeds of that are used to reduce heating bills for people on low and middle incomes.

Any surplus revenue could be used to provide grants for insulating homes. That is the cheapest and most efficient solution, all things considered.

Investing in renewable energy and energy-saving is what we have to do, certainly over the medium term. Meanwhile, however, we have to find solutions for those who are struggling. Europe cannot turn a deaf ear to them.

James Nicholson (PPE-DE), in writing. – The recent exponential rise in oil prices and subsequent crippling fuel prices are having a hugely negative impact on business and industries across the EU. Of course, this situation also has serious consequences for the average consumer. Citizens are feeling the pinch with rising food and fuel prices and reduced purchasing power.

I agree with the Commission that we must aim to reduce our consumption and dependency on oil and focus our efforts on promoting energy efficiency and developing renewable energy sources.

However, this is a long-term solution. For the moment, practical and tangible steps must be taken to ease the pressure on groups such as farmers, fishermen and members of society who are most vulnerable to these price increases. Even if short-term measures such as tax reductions are outside the scope of EU competence, the Union must be seen to take the lead and encourage national governments to implement solutions. The current situation is unsustainable and efforts must be made to tackle it.

12. The crisis in the fisheries sector caused by rising fuel oil prices (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on:

- the oral question to the Council by Philippe Morillon, on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries, on the crisis in the fisheries sector caused by the rising fuel oil prices (O-0063/2008 – B6-0162/2008), and

- the oral question to the Commission by Philippe Morillon, on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries, on the crisis in the fisheries sector caused by the rising fuel oil prices (O-0064/2008 – B6-0163/2008).
Philippe Morillon, author. – (FR) Madam President, I will allow Commissioner Borg some time to settle into his seat. This oral question was initiated at the unanimous request of those groups sitting on the committee that I have the honour of chairing, and I am pleased that it comes after this most excellent debate, which dealt with a number of general issues.

Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, my father was born more than a century ago in a village near Saint-Malo, which in my youth I knew as a place full of life that was dependent essentially on agriculture and fishing. Today this village is dying from a cancer caused by the proliferation of dead cells that are the holiday homes and the gradual disappearance of all those activities that used to enable it to live for more than just the six summer weeks.

This is not an isolated phenomenon but is something that can be seen happening along practically the entire coastline of Europe and as a result of this situation Commissioner Borg, to whom I pay tribute, has been moved to propose the Integrated Maritime Policy, which should enable us to restore, preserve and resurrect the communities that live around the coasts of Europe. If this decision has meant transforming DG FISH into DG MARE it does not necessarily mean that the European Union is determined to see an end to those resources that our fishermen have to continue to exploit in the seas and oceans.

Why does the European Union only have two common policies, namely the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy? When you think about it the answer is simple: it is to enable our continent to continue to obtain sufficient quantities of food by working the soil and fishing the seas. It is therefore in these sectors where the impact of the massive increase in oil prices could well have catastrophic consequences, and of course this applies particularly to the fisheries industry. Already badly shaken by the reduction in resources this profession is today essentially threatened with extinction and this explains – though does not excuse – the violent manifestations of despair that some of its representatives have resorted to and continue to carry on in certain places.

This is why I am delighted, Commissioner, that your Executive Committee has now proposed a number of measures designed to come to the immediate rescue of those industries that are most threatened, including authorising Member States to grant special temporary exemption from the rules that have been imposed for the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund in accordance with procedures that are to be discussed, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, in Luxembourg on 24 June at the next Council of Ministers on agriculture and fisheries.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that the European Union – and the planet in general – has to be able to continue using the seas and oceans to obtain the food resources it needs. There is no point in preserving and protecting the fish if there are no longer fishermen to catch them. In my opinion this obvious fact justifies the detailed proposals that will cover not just the short term but the medium and long term too, proposals that we are working on together, Commissioner, in the Committee on Fisheries, proposals that will be further elaborated to you by the rest of my colleagues and in the draft resolution that will be put to the vote tomorrow.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC
Vice-President

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) First I would like to thank the Honourable Member of the European Parliament, Mr Morillon, for his question on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries. May I stress from the outset that the Slovenian presidency is aware of the magnitude of the problem concerning rising fuel prices and their negative impact on fisheries in the EU.

I can inform you that yesterday the President of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, Minister Iztok Jarc, met with some fellow ministers in Venice, in order to discuss this issue. Together they debated and prepared some proposals for improving current difficulties in the EU fisheries sector, which will be discussed in the coming days. However, I would like to recall that this situation is not confined to the fisheries industry. High fuel prices are detrimental to all industries across the board, including agriculture, transport and manufacturing.

The crisis has triggered a serious situation in all sectors. It is therefore an issue of a horizontal nature, which comprises elements touching on competition policy, state aid and fiscal measures. It is the gravity of this issue and its negative impact on the EU fisheries sector that provoked the Slovenian Presidency to include it on the agenda of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council to be held early next week, as Mr Morillon has already mentioned.
This will serve as an opportunity for Ministers to present their views on the current situation and exchange views on most the appropriate solutions with Commissioner Borg. Furthermore, the Presidency decided to change the theme of the informal meeting of fisheries directors to be held in Slovenia at the end of this month, so that fisheries directors will also be able to discuss this burning issue. All this comes after the Council recently in its numerous meetings in various formations addressed the issue of rising energy prices, and about which we spoke under the previous item on the agenda.

Allow me to explain in greater detail the conclusions of the Ecofin Council. In relation to oil prices, the Council expressed concern at the continued surge in oil prices and discussed ways of addressing the attendant social and economic consequences. It underscored the need to foster energy efficiency and alternative energy sources, increase the transparency of oil markets, promote competition in energy markets and enhance dialogue with oil-producing countries.

In the same meeting, the Council also encouraged the Commission to further review commodity-related markets and to consider policy responses aimed at limiting price volatility. As the Presidency has already stressed in the morning debate, this issue will be discussed also at the meeting of the European Council, beginning tomorrow.

Joe Borg, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would like to thank the chairman of the Committee on Fisheries, Mr Morillon, for his question, which gives me the opportunity to address the fuel crisis.

I would like to say at the outset that I am pleased to see the existing very good relations between the Commission and the Fisheries Committee of the European Parliament moving from strength to strength.

Turning to the specific question, I am aware of the difficulties the fishing sector is going through as a result of the steep increase in the price of fuel. This increase constitutes a crisis which is structural and long-lasting and which takes on a very particular – I would be tempted to say even unique – dimension with regard to fisheries. Let me say why.

For many years, the EU fleet has suffered from a vicious circle of overcapacity, over-fishing, and declining profitability. At the same time, fishermen have been unable to benefit from reduced supply and rising retail prices for fish products. As a result, margins in many segments are wafer-thin, making the sector more vulnerable than others to a drastic rise in costs, such as we have seen with the price of oil.

The Commission understands the need for coordinated action at EU level to avert a serious crisis for the industry, and to ensure that the problem is not simply displaced but really tackled head-on. This means not only providing the possibility of emergency relief, but also committing to finally addressing the underlying issue of overcapacity, which is undermining all our attempts to get the industry back on a sustainable and profitable footing.

For these reasons, as Mr Morillon pointed out, the College yesterday approved in principle the contents of an emergency package of measures to tackle the immediate social and economic hardship triggered by the dramatic rise in the price of oil while also tackling the underlying structural problems of the European fleet. I believe that it is vital to focus aid on the fleets which are most dependent on fuel and thus most affected by the current overcapacity.

We therefore propose that Member States can set up Fleet Adjustment Schemes (FAS), under which limitations on access to permanent cessation – i.e. scrapping – premiums will be lifted. Additional aid for temporary cessation would be available for vessels involved in these Fleet Adjustment Schemes and partial decommissioning aid would be granted to operators who replace larger old vessels with smaller, more energy-efficient ones. There would also be provisions to allow for temporary reductions in employees’ contributions to social security payments.

More specifically, temporary cessation aid would be available for all vessels for up to three months throughout the remainder of 2008, on condition that the vessels in question be included in a restructuring plan. Such aid will be tailored to ensure that it supports stock recovery and/or marketing conditions, whenever possible.

Based on further economic analyses, possible modifications to the de minimis regime for fisheries will also be considered, so that the ceiling of EUR 30 000 per three years would be applied per vessel, rather than per firm – though with an overall cap of EUR 100 000 per firm.

A number of specific initiatives to promote the value of fish at the first point of sale are also envisaged, and the Commission is planning to set aside an additional EUR 20-25 million from the CFP budget to fund ad
hoc projects in this area, in addition to the funds available under the EFF. Further measures are planned to encourage the shift to energy-saving technologies, cushion the socioeconomic impact of the crisis, and facilitate the reprogramming and the disbursement of EFF funds.

The above measures will consist of temporary derogations from the rules of the European Fisheries Fund so as to support faster adaptation of the EU fleet to the present situation and provide temporary relief during the transitional phase.

I will be presenting this package to the Council of Fisheries Ministers in Luxembourg on 24 June with the intention of adopting a formal proposal on this subject as early as July. Given the exceptional situation being faced by the fisheries sector I trust I can count on the support of both the Council and the Parliament to adopt the said measures as speedily as possible.

Carmen Fraga Estévez, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (ES) Mr President, the Group of the European People’s Party propelled this debate in the belief that our institution could not continue to show indifference in the light of the gravity of the crisis.

I think that we were right, given that only yesterday, and for the first time, the Commission announced a series of measures that this Parliament had been requesting for years, some of which are identical to those contained in the joint motion for a resolution.

As indicated in the resolution, the price of fuel for fishermen has risen by more than 300% in the last five years and more than 38% since January, while prices have remained the same for 20 years, with decreases in some cases of up to 25% as a result of the massive entry of imports, which are often products of illegal fishing.

My Group has emphasised that there is no sector that can survive these conditions and that is why it wanted to bring everyone together today, including the Council and the Commission, to find out more about this issue and debate the package of measures.

We are particularly pleased that the measures at last include an increase in de minimis aid to EUR 100 000, although we would have preferred it to be allocated per vessel instead of per undertaking, as this Parliament has requested and as stipulated in the joint resolution.

We fully support the reductions in social costs and the announcement of greater flexibility of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) so that all those who so desire can opt to restructure their undertakings, replace their engines with more efficient engines or receive additional aid, as you indicated, for temporary cessation.

We nevertheless believe, Commissioner, that there is another set of measures that warranted the same emphasis and should have been developed in as much detail as those aimed at the restructuring of the sector: I am referring to market-based measures, such as the reform of the COM, which enable fishermen to play a greater role in the setting of prices, more specific measures concerning labelling and, above all, measures that demonstrate the clear will of the Council and the Commission to combat illegal fishing.

We thus welcome some of the measures that are a step in the right direction, but we have to wonder whether we might have prevented the sector from reaching this critical situation by reacting much sooner.

Rosa Miguélez Ramos, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (ES) Mr President, I am also pleased with, and welcome, the measures announced by the Commission. It appears that in some cases they go even further than those requested by Parliament in its motion for a resolution. The fact that we have managed to make space for a debate on this issue during this very busy part-session gives some idea of the importance this House places on the matter.

I believe that in these somewhat unsettled times Europeans should tackle this crisis together using an effective and unbiased mechanism: that could take the form of the much-demanded increase in flexibility of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), which would enable us to adopt urgent measures at Community level.

National solutions like those proposed by some Member States would only lead to imbalances.

We hope, Commissioner, that at the meeting of the Council of Ministers next Monday the Commission will be able to clarify matters even further and reach agreement with the Council of Ministers on how the EFF can be used to help the segments of the fleet that have been most affected.

It also appears to be urgent to examine once and for all the price-setting mechanism.
Elspeth Attwooll, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Mr President, we need to stress the fact that a very high proportion of our fishermen are engaged in running small businesses. They have a limited right to fish. To exercise this right, they have to invest in boats, fishing gear and safety equipment. This can involve the repayment of substantial loans. They also need to pay for licences and, in certain cases, may do so for quota too. They then incur considerable running costs, such as for labour, repairs and, of course, fuel.

The rules on quota and days at sea may require them to travel long distances to acquire a saleable catch. Particularly in the case of bad weather, they may fail to do so. When they are successful, they still do not have control over the price of fish caught. In most cases they are dependent on what can be raised at auction. So they simply do not have the means of compensating for rising costs.

The resolution sets out various practical means of assistance. That can be through the de minimis rule and its upward revision. I would urge all Member States to make use of the opportunities to which the rule gives rise, so as to maintain a level playing field.

Urgent, too, are steps to curb IUU fishing, not just to help maintain the price of legally caught fish, but for stock conservation. This is true, too, of improving labelling requirements. Other measures suggested, including restructuring but going beyond that to energy efficiency and alternative energy sources, also serve environmental purposes. In adopting them, we can bring benefits for our beleaguered fishermen and our endangered planet alike.

Marie-Hélène Aubert, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, as you have recalled, this structural crisis is both deep and enduring. It therefore calls for solutions that will also endure, not just for the fisheries industry but for all the sectors concerned.

It also has to be said that the current crisis is precisely the result of years of blindness to the reliance of the fisheries sector on fuel – and cheap fuel at that – and to the headlong rush to a kind of arms race, with ever more powerful vessels that can go out further and further and bring back ever greater quantities of fish. These are also some of the issues that we have to tackle.

The problem of expensive fuel oil is inseparable from all the other questions that affect the fisheries sector – management of fish stocks, pricing policies, world trade, the control of illegal fishing – and it is difficult to deal with this issue in isolation from the rest.

The subsidies and aid that the Commission is proposing to provide, and which appear to me to be going in the right direction, will only be acceptable – especially as far as the public is concerned – if they are dependent on an in-depth reorientation of fishery policies and fishery practices. For our part, we regret that the joint compromise resolution does not in fact lay down conditions for the aid and subsidies that can be granted for this reorientation and for the obligation to put an end to fleet overcapacity and to move towards a better management of the fishery stocks and better protection of the marine ecosystems. What is more, this is the very condition on which the economic and social viability of the fisheries depends. Finally, we would like to see the Member States assuming full responsibility of their own and ending the demagogic practice of promising money they do not have without putting forward any sustainable policies for the fisheries industry.

Pedro Guerreiro, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (PT) We are having this debate because fishermen, including Portuguese fishermen, have mobilised to demand measures, proposed some time ago, in response to the rising price of fuel, both petrol and diesel, and to the socioeconomic crisis in the sector, given the attitude of indifference, particularly of the European Union.

Our Group has tabled its own motion for a resolution in which we set out our proposals, some previously adopted by the European Parliament, and put forward new measures to respond to the sector’s needs.

These measures would provide support for vessels running on petrol, similar to what is happening with diesel, establish a maximum price level or an additional discount for fuel, specifically of 40 cents per litre, improve prices at the initial point of sale without any repercussions on prices for the end consumer, ensure that production costs are one of the variables taken into account when setting guidance prices and ensure a fair income for crews.

Decisions are required in response to the rising price of fuel and the price formation process for fish at the initial point of sale. These are the two main factors at the heart of the worsening crisis in the sector.

Jeffrey Titford, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group. – Mr President, the massive fuel oil price increases we are talking about today may well be the straw that breaks the camel’s back for many British fishermen. They are
already worn down by the endless regulations and quota cuts spewing out from this institution and bringing their industry to its knees.

Now they are in the invidious position of being unable to put to sea in order to catch the meagre amounts of fish they are still allowed to land, because the cost of fuel makes it unprofitable before they start. The British Government has for many years abandoned them and has done so again in respect of fuel subsidies to help them through their present crisis.

Some of the fishermen in my area have been forced to seek a legal review of their situation because under the CFP they are supposed to be guaranteed a living from fishing.

The UK Independence Party believes the CFP is an unmitigated disaster that Britain should pull out of, to regain control of its own waters while it still has some fishermen left.

Struan Stevenson (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I am very glad that the Commissioner has today addressed the much wider crisis in this sector, which has been compounded by the steep rise in diesel cost. As Mr Titford just said – and I rarely agree with him, but I do in this case – in some fishing nations the huge cost of fuel has followed in the wake of dwindling quotas and falling prices for fish. The situation is so bad that some crew in the UK now are earning less than GBP 100 a week, and that is driving hundreds of them to leave the industry at exactly the time that we need more young recruits joining the industry. Many vessels, as everyone in this Chamber knows, can no longer afford to put to sea. They lose money on every trip they make. Angry fishermen are blockading ports; striking lorry drivers are refusing to carry freight: and that means the markets for fish are being completely disrupted at the most productive time of the year.

But I am greatly encouraged by the provisions and the proposals that Commissioner Borg has unveiled to us this afternoon. Those Member States who submit proposals for fleet adjustment schemes or for the complete restructuring of their fisheries sector can receive aid from the European Fisheries Fund, and this will go a long way to alleviating the acute crisis affecting the sector at the present time.

I am deeply ashamed that the British Government is refusing to accept this aid, refusing to apply for this co-financed aid. It is atrocious that our fishermen should end up fishing in the same water for the same species as fishermen from other neighbouring nations who will be receiving this aid. That further distorts the market.

So we need to support the creation of a smaller, more fuel-efficient fleet that is better matched to fishing possibilities. I think what the Commission is proposing will achieve that.

Paulo Casaca (PSE). – (PT) I believe that, in this crisis, we have to understand that the rise in fuel prices is the catalyst for a situation that was already far from healthy and that was already raising some major concerns.

This is also – and I feel that this must be stressed – a crisis of European dimensions, so it is not right to try and respond to this at national level.

Thirdly, I want to congratulate the Commissioner and the Commission on the plan that has just been presented. In my opinion, these are appropriate measures, even though they may not go far enough, but they will help to solve the problem at its roots and in the structural factors causing this problem.

I hope we can continue along this road which I feel is the right one.

Jacky Hénin (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Mr President, every fishing port in the European Union is urgently calling for two things: fuel oil at a standard price Europe-wide of 40 cents a litre and concerted management of quotas.

These legitimate demands are vital to the fisheries industry and to the jobs it provides. The huge hike in oil prices and the preservation of fish stocks are real problems. The free market is proving incapable of controlling the impact of the rising fuel prices. Swelled-up with profits the oil companies respond by speculating on the increased demand for their products in the emerging nations, hoping thereby to burst the bank. By reducing the tax on fuel, which is forever increasing, and taxing the colossal profits of the oil companies we could easily meet the demands of the fishermen without the need for subsidies, especially those paid out haphazardly.

What is more, the fishermen will no longer accept being treated like delinquents of the sea by a Commission that is covering up for the real rogues that are the flags of convenience and the fishing industry cartels. No one is more committed than the fishermen to the conservation of marine stocks. The system needs to be
completely reformed and the Commission should be working democratically with the professionals of the fishing industry rather than imposing a dictatorship based on the rule of its pseudo experts.

Ioannis Gklavakis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I welcome the Commissioner and the President-in-Office.

In the last five years, fishing has suffered the consequences of rising fuel prices. Since 2004, the price of fuel has risen by 240%. The Commission and the European Parliament are taking measures to overcome the problem, but the situation has not improved so far. On the contrary, it has worsened.

Since the beginning of 2008, we have seen an increase of 40% in the region. Many fishermen – French, Italian, Portuguese, Greek and Spanish – have started tying up their ships. Why is this? Because the cost of fishing is higher than the price they get for their fish.

I am very deeply concerned because I fear that a very fine social group will go to rack and ruin. It upholds traditions, and I am referring to our fishermen. We must save them from impending disaster. I endorse the offer to step up all the measures proposed by my fellow Members to combat illegal fishing and related problems. However, I also want to add a very important point. The European Fisheries Fund must be activated to secure resources, and with this money we will help our fishermen to survive. If not, we shall be facing something of a crisis.

Stavros Arnaoutakis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in the wake of uncontrolled fuel price rises there are increasing numbers of vociferous protests and signs of despair on the part of the fishermen of many Member States. We can no longer remain passive observers of these vigorous protests. It is essential that the EU should take immediate measures to provide relief to those plying this trade. They are suffering hardship without having any other options or means of overcoming the situation.

If the EU does not provide immediate solutions, we will be faced with a political problem regarding the Union’s effectiveness in dealing with emergencies such as the one we are experiencing now. This shifting of responsibility from the Commission to the Member States and back again must stop once and for all. In any case, someone has to take the responsibility and initiative, and according to our European vision, that is the job of the EU. European policies, Commissioner! I think your proposals are a move in the right direction.

Cornelis Visser (PPE-DE). – (NL) Mr President, the fishing industry finds itself in heavy weather due to the high fuel costs. In 2008 alone the price of diesel has risen by more than 38%. There are no signs for the time being that the price increase will come to an end. In my country, the Netherlands, about 15 boats from the trawler fleet have already been laid up, because every fishing trip is making a loss. However, it is not only the sharp increase in prices that is responsible for the dramatic situation. The import of large quantities of fish from outside the European Union at low prices is partly responsible for this situation. Large quantities of yellowtail flounder and Pacific sole are imported into the Netherlands and sometimes sold as sole and plaice. This brings them into unfair competition with the sole and plaice caught by Dutch fishermen. More checks should be done on the use of the names of these fish species.

The Dutch fleet also needs to go through a transition. The existing boats are too big and too dependent on fossil fuels. In fact, all the boats should be replaced by smaller multi-purpose boats using sustainable fishing methods.

Unfortunately, the Commission has only issued temporary permits for five boats using the electric stimulus method of fishing for sole. We would like to see more.

The industry needs financial resources in order to survive and work must be done on this in the short term. I am pleased with the Commissioner’s proposals. There may also be options through the CO₂ savings in the fishing industry. It would be good to take another look at that. The Dutch fishing fleet is responsible for about 1% of the total CO₂ emissions. We want to reduce that by 20%. If you look at the price of CO₂ at EUR 25 per tonne, there are opportunities there. Certainly when you remember that with restructuring, that fleet disappears, and so there is a complete reduction in CO₂ emissions. We could calculate on the basis of a write-down of seven years. I hope that the Commission will take these proposals further. Parliament will certainly support them but perhaps you can also get something out of this.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Mr President, the common fisheries policy has failed miserably and has contributed to the sharp decline in Europe’s fish stocks. It is not fit for purpose.
The recent rise in marine fuel prices – an increase of over 240% on 2004 levels, according to the Commission, over 30% in recent months – has only exacerbated the already well-documented devastation of our fisheries and fishing industry in Europe.

While we all agree that certain urgent short-term measures need to be taken at EU and Member State level to alleviate the plight of fishermen, skippers and their crews – such as appropriate levels of state aid, perhaps reduction in tax on fuel over a certain price, financial support for tying-up and greater control of imports garnered from illegal fishing, to name but a few options – we as policymakers must also look to the future. It is time for us to consider new options in any medium- to long-term restructuring plan, as well as the necessary decommissioning grants to match fleet capacity to available resources.

What about a market-based approach with a tradable quota system, rather than continuing the practice of overbearing regulation, which has simultaneously decimated the fishing industry and precipitated the serious decline in fish stocks? The present CFP perversely incentivises the immoral and unsustainable practice of discarding accidental by-catch and juveniles, as it is illegal to land them. We discussed this recently in the Schlyter report. This problem is compounded by illegal imports, unreported and unregulated fishing, as discussed at the last part-session.

According to some experts, such as Thorvaldur Gylfason, Professor of Economics at the University of Iceland, a fee-based trading policy, determined by an independent authority, could make every kilo of sustainable fish valuable so that there would be no inducement to discard fish or land it illegally. Would the Commission and the Council not agree that a tradable quota system, informed by economic and environmental rationale with an ecosystem-based management, could, on the one hand, preserve valuable marine resources for present and future generations while, on the other hand, offering some solace to the productive and efficient fishermen who are crying out for reform?

Yes, we need short-term emergency measures for the present marine fuel crisis, together with medium- and long-term restructuring, informed by environmental and economic rationale, instead of making criminals of our most productive and efficient fishermen who lie awake wondering, as one Irish fishermen’s spokesman said: ‘Will it be the boat or the house that will go first?’

Daniel Varela Suanzes-Carpegna (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, on the initiative of my Group, and with everyone’s support, we are debating the serious crisis in the fisheries sector and we are doing so separately from the general fuel crisis because even though the price of fuel has aggravated the crisis, it is only the straw that broke the camel’s back.

The crisis is much deeper and needs to be dealt with urgently. To save the sector the Commission, the Council and the Member States must in agreement adopt a programme that fulfils the following 10 requirements that I have garnered from this debate.

One: more checks on illegal imports. Two: more checks on legal imports. Three: reform of the COM with greater emphasis on prices to fishermen at initial sale. Four: reorientation of the aid under the European Fisheries Fund. Five: reprogramming of national operational programmes. Six: payment and increase in the amount of de minimis aid per vessel; fortunately, the Commission seems to have understood this but the proposal has to be improved because it is not exactly what we want. Seven: adoption of fiscal aid. Eight: adoption of social aid. Nine: improved transparency and consumer guarantees, labelling and traceability. Ten: consumer advertising campaigns and sectoral support.

These 10 requirements can be summarised in just two: greater payments and aid for our fishermen, and sanctions for offenders.

Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office, either we do this now or we will literally have to carry the European Union’s fisheries sector. I know that Commissioner Borg is aware of these issues and is doing what he can, but I believe that we must help to improve this proposal. I hope that the Council will also do the same next week and that we can take advantage of the French Presidency, which is propelling this reform, to implement it in full.

We must use the opportunities available because time is of the essence.

Duarte Freitas (PPE-DE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the future of fishing is facing two threats: firstly, the sustainability of resources and, secondly, the survival of fishermen. We therefore have to guarantee the future in two ways: firstly, by limiting fishing and, secondly, by helping fishermen to survive and fish better.
It seems that the Commission is finally aware of these problems and some governments, such as the Portuguese Government which had completely ignored this issue, are starting to wake up to the disaster.

It should also be noted that in some countries, such as Portugal, 85% of the fleet is small scale and, of these vessels, nearly half run on petrol. As a result, this issue must also be taken into account and measures defined which can be applied equally to everyone so that governments do not have any excuse.

We should also consider extending to this area some of the support that exists for the merchant navy, such as in relation to the integrated social security contribution. This is because the structural measures will serve no purpose and have no future if we do not ensure that fishermen will be around tomorrow. That is what is at stake.

Chris Davies (ALDE). – Mr President, the rise in oil prices affects everyone. So why is the fishing sector being singled out for special treatment? Why do we not just subsidise everyone?

Local inshore fishermen will suffer least from this increase in prices while the deep-sea operators will suffer the most. These are the people operating huge vessels, travelling great distances, employing relatively few people but hovering up the fish in vast quantities, bringing about the mass extinction of the fish in the seas.

Our response to the rise in fuel prices should be to free up the market and let the laws of supply and demand take effect. The very last thing we should do is provide subsidies that will help make fish extinct – it is the policy of madness. When all the fish have gone we should remember that we did our best to make it happen.

Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN). – (GA) Mr President, I would like to welcome the package proposed by the Commission. However, I would like to say – coming from Ireland – that Ireland never received its proper share from the Common Fisheries Policy, and that was reflected in the vote last week.

It is high time for the European Union to demonstrate that it can provide assistance to the fishing industry in its time of need, as that industry is indeed in difficulty. It is the small fishers who are worst off in this regard.

Ireland has 11% of the European seas but less than 4% of the quotas. The policy is not working. However, it is important now for the European Union to unite and to show that it can come to the assistance of fishers in their time of need. I ask that everything possible be done to promote this package and that it can be seen to work.

Jim Allister (NI). – Mr President, there is much about the Commissioner’s package to welcome, but for me the key issue is delivery. How do you get common standards of delivery across the EU amongst the Member States, with some, like mine, the United Kingdom, ever-reluctant to take any financial assistance steps, even when they are permitted?

Could I ask the Commissioner today not to be neutral on that, but to expressly call upon all Member States to do what they are now permitted to do under his package and no longer to sit on their hands in this regard?

Otherwise we will continue to have an even less common fisheries policy, compounding inequality and delivering more disaster for the sector.

Related to that point – because some love to pass the parcel between national governments and the Commission – could the Commissioner identify within the new package exactly those measures which are wholly dependent on Member State contributions and any, if there are any, which are free of that?

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, fisheries are a very specific sector of our economy. The economic entities within it are fragmented and widely scattered. They are often local family enterprises. Their fishing capacity is restricted, and they are therefore unable to increase production so as to obtain an acceptable income despite higher costs. One could argue that if costs have increased then the price of fish should go up, but there is a limit to that process. How much is the consumer willing to pay? Who is right in all this?

I propose that specific fuel payments be made to fishermen, to help them cope with the difficult situation they are currently experiencing. These payments would be linked to the price of fuel oil. Fishermen and their families do not have opportunities to earn additional income from other activities. To summarise, a new approach to fisheries policy is needed.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Mr President, in July 2007 I went to Castletownbere in West Cork, which is in the south-western part of Ireland, and met with the fishing community there. At that time they were in deep
It is not just about people working on trawlers and people owning trawlers, it is about coastal communities. They are the people that are affected, and this is extremely important.

I welcome the proposals from the Commission, but I also think there should be further proposals in relation to dealing with the whole issue of discarded bycatches, and I think that has not been dealt with and needs to be dealt with immediately.

We need to make it more efficient and make it more cost-effective, but we also need to make sure that people are able to make a living from it: not only the people involved in the industry, but also people living in coastal communities.

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE), – (PT) I should like to request that there also be good news on 24 June for small-scale fishing and coastal fishing in Portugal.

As my colleague Duarte Freitas has already mentioned, we have heard a lot of talk about diesel, about support for diesel, but 85% of the vessels in Portugal operate in the small-scale fishing sector and over half run on petrol. These are small vessels with outboard engines. They are not receiving any help with regard to petrol and have been completely forgotten. It is essential that a similar and equivalent scheme to that for diesel is set up for petrol used in fishing.

Last Friday I went fishing with fishermen from Esposende and I can testify to the enormous sacrifice that they are making. The Commission will not reach these fishermen unless it also adopts measures for small-scale fishing on 24 June.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council, – (SL) In my concluding statement I would also like to emphasise that the Council is aware of the difficult position of the fisheries sector in the European Union, but two aspects need to be distinguished: one is the specific features of the fisheries sector, and the other is the high prices of fuel, which as already stated are affecting numerous, practically all sectors, including of course fisheries.

The Council has been very active in seeking solutions: intensive consultations are in progress, and they will culminate next week at the meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council, whilst short-term, medium-term and long-term measures are being sought where the aim is to preserve European fisheries, to bridge the current difficult phase and to preserve both coastal as well as pelagic fisheries.

I can assure you that I have followed this debate closely and that the Chairman of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council will be familiarised in detail with the views expressed in this debate, including your first responses to the proposals and plans presented by the Commissioner.

Joe Borg, Member of the Commission, – Mr President, I would firstly like to thank everyone for their comments, for the various points that they have raised and also for the general expression of support for the package that the Commission intends to propose.

I would like to say that this is not the end of the whole process but just the beginning. We still need to steer these proposals through Council and Parliament and I would repeat that we need your full support in order to get these proposals through as rapidly as possible, especially in those parts which would require legislative amendment.

What I have presented represents, in my view, the limits of flexibility in addressing the short-term crisis, with a view to putting in place a medium- and longer-term perspective of restructuring, in order to regain sustainability of resources and the profitability of the sector. I agree that these measures should not be seen in isolation but also within the context of the ongoing discussions concerning IUU, discards, eco-labelling and various other measures which we are in the process of having adopted.

With regard to IUU for example, I hope that on Tuesday of next week a decision will be taken in Council on the proposed regulation to effectively combat IUU fishing, on which the European Parliament has given overwhelming support.

I would like to say to Mr Davies that we are not proposing to throw money at the problem, but to provide assistance with a view to restructuring – as I said, to regain sustainable fishing and profitable fishing. I would invite Mr Davies to examine what we would be proposing and, if he has any specific comments to make, I
would certainly welcome them. Yes, we will work to enable the proper market mechanisms to operate rather
than continuing to allow a few huge operators to dominate the market when setting fish prices.

In response to what Mr Allister said, the package makes it more attractive for Member States to take up what
is available under the European Fisheries Fund, and therefore we hope that Member States will fully engage.
We will be discussing this in next week's Council in order to implement effectively these measures that we
are proposing.

I will just go very briefly through the measures that are envisaged.

First of all, we are looking at the emergency measures, where we are proposing assistance for temporary
cessation for fishing vessels (and this also goes in the direction of sustainability) for a maximum period of
three months in addition to what is already in the European Fisheries Fund, and not linked exclusively to
biological reasons. Such a measure may finance cruise costs and fixed costs of vessels. This measure will only
apply in cases where there is an explicit commitment that the enterprises benefiting from it will be included
in a restructuring plan within a period of six months.

A second provision relates to the increase in the EFF aid intensity for fuel-saving equipment. We are proposing
that the mandatory private financial participation will be at a lower rate and will therefore be at 40% of its
present level.

We are also proposing to extend further a number of socioeconomic measures which are eligible under EFF.
On de minimis aid we are looking at making provisions so that if, on an economic analysis, it proves to be
feasible, then our proposal would be to extend the de minimis aid from EUR 30 000 per enterprise to
EUR 30 000 per vessel but with a maximum cap of EUR 100 000 per enterprise.

The longer-term measures would relate to EFF premiums for permanent cessation of fleets in restructuring,
so that we would lift any limitations on access to permanent cessation premiums; and additional aid for
temporary cessation, so that beyond the first three months that I mentioned, we will be proposing that there
will be an additional three months to be taken during the period of restructuring, where vessels will be
necessarily laid up because of the restructuring process. This would be up to the period of 1 January 2010,
and for an additional three months if the restructuring needs to go beyond 1 January 2010. So it would be
a maximum of six months beyond the three months given as an emergency aid.

We are also providing for increasing the aid intensity for modernisation schemes. Today the private financial
participation is 60% and 80% for gear and engine replacement respectively. We are proposing to reduce the
private financial participation to 40%. We are doing this because we realise that the private sector – the
private entrepreneurs, the fishermen – are not in a position to be able to significantly part-finance any
restructuring out of their own pockets. We are trying to make it as easy as possible for fishermen to undertake
restructuring by providing the lion’s share of the expense that will be incurred.

We are also allowing for the granting of partial decommissioning. In other words, if there is a group of vessels
and that group of vessels represents, say, 100 000 tonnes, and they undertake to decommission 50 000 or
60 000 tonnes, leaving 40 000 tonnes by virtue of which they want to construct new vessels, then for the
amount partially decommissioned – for the 50 000 or 60 000 tonnes – they would be given decommissioning
aid. Obviously that would mean that the size of the fleet would be reduced. You would have a newer fleet
but this would mean that the compensation would have been paid for the amount by which it had been
reduced.

We are also proposing social aid in the form of decreased social security contributions. In other words, what
we are proposing is that there will be the possibility for the contributions payable by fishermen, and not the
contributions payable by the enterprises employing them, to be exempted on condition that the remuneration
of the fishermen is not reduced and on condition that the fishermen remain in receipt of the same social
benefits under any existing schemes.

With regard to market measures – a point mentioned by Mrs Fraga – I would like to state that there are
various measures which we are proposing: increasing fishermen’s bargaining position vis-à-vis the processing
industry and distributors by joining forces with larger POs or local marketing associations; establishing a
price monitoring system to better understand the factors determining market prices; improving predictability
of sourcing for EU-origin products for the industry; promoting quality initiatives like labelling and better
handling and processing; promoting information to consumers; health and nutrition; responsible fishing;
market audit assessment; developing tools to analyse the value chain and prices; and verifying the correct
implementation of the monitoring of labelling measures and IUU.
We are also making available from our own funds – from other fisheries funds – for the first year, EUR 20-25 million in order specifically to launch other projects in cooperation with the sector in the area of market monitoring, labelling etc. We are prepared to reopen discussions with Member States – even though we have just concluded them – on the existing operational programmes in order to ensure that the European fisheries funds are focused more on these restructuring programmes. We are facilitating the use of the European Fisheries Fund. For example – just to mention one point in addition – it is proposed to double the EFF pre-financing amount paid by the Commission after the adoption of the operational programmes from the current 7% to 14% of the total EFF contribution.

I have two final points. Mrs Fraga said that we could have done more before. I would like just to introduce a nuance to this. We could have acted differently before. We could have avoided incentivising and encouraging over-capacity and not thrown precious public money at unwarranted huge increases of capacity way beyond what the stocks of our fish can reasonably sustain.

Concerning Mrs Doyle's remarks – that the CFP has failed miserably – I simply do not agree. It is because of the CFP that we can put forward proposed common solutions as we are doing now, instead of witnessing individual Member States joining in a race downhill in the direction of the total destruction of fishing.

President. – I have received six motions for a resolution(1), pursuant to Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Sylwester Chruszcz (NI), in writing. – (PL) This debate is very important both for all coastal states and for consumers. As previous speakers have pointed out, we had all lived under the delusion that the price of oil would never increase. Clearly, this situation arose as a result of many years of neglect and lack of imagination on the part of the relevant institutions. Nowadays, simply putting to sea in fishing vessels has become uneconomical. The price of fish does not compensate for the investment. A large number of fishermen may leave the profession, which would knock that entire economic sector off balance. It seems to me that scant notice was taken of appeals by fishermen in the past. It was only when this last crisis arose that the consciences of many were awakened, even though the sector first began to experience difficulties many years ago. No wide-ranging factual and honest debate on the sector has yet taken place. We must resolve this deep crisis immediately and work to ensure the future of the fisheries sector.

Sebastiano (Nello) Musumeci (UEN), in writing. – (IT) Fuel oil prices in Italy have risen by 240% in four years owing to strong speculation by the oil companies. This is preventing the fishing fleet – especially small-scale operators – not only from plying its trade but even from offsetting its high management costs. Europe's marine industries are on the verge of collapse, and the high cost of fuel oil is eroding the narrow economic margins available to fishermen.

France and Italy have announced a joint initiative to apply for additional resources from the European Union. The main idea is to double the national threshold for de minimis aid to the sector. Such a measure would nonetheless be insufficient to obviate the serious difficulties besetting the fisheries sector, which has moreover already been facing a crisis.

The European Commissioner for Fisheries, Joe Borg, considers that rapid aid is a possibility but also maintains that, in the long term, the solution to the crisis in the sector lies in restructuring the fleet, making it smaller and less energy-intensive.

Although I can go along with the proposal to use vessels which guzzle less oil, it still remains urgently necessary to find fair ways of helping fishermen overcome this grave crisis and of rescuing numerous families from the threat of appalling poverty.

(1) See Minutes.
13. Preparation of the EU/Russia summit (26-27 June 2008) (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on preparations for the EU-Russia summit (26-27 June 2008).

**Janez Lenarčič,** President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) It is my great pleasure to present preparations for the twenty-first EU-Russia summit which will take place at the end of this month, on 26 and 27 June, in the Western Siberian town of Khanty-Mansiisk.

The Presidency believes that the upcoming Summit is the right opportunity for both sides to open a new chapter in mutual relations. In particular, we should be ready to make use of the potential positive momentum that the recent election of the Russian President Medvedev could bring to EU-Russia relations.

The main objective for the Summit is obviously to launch negotiations on the new framework Agreement with Russia. We are very pleased that the Council of 26 May adopted the EU negotiating mandate for the new Agreement. In recent months the Presidency, together with the Commission, has invested a lot of effort at the highest level in trying to overcome the remaining obstacles on the EU side.

By negotiating a new Agreement, the EU will endeavour to further deepen its cooperation with Russia in areas of common interest, while addressing more effectively the topics where our positions may differ. As usual, the Summit will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress in implementing the four Common Spaces. Allow me to briefly highlight their major characteristics.

As for the first common space, which is Economic space, the Summit will push for the early warning mechanism in the field of energy, as we want to take full advantage of all the options it offers. We will restate the prime importance of predictable and stable rules for foreign investments in Russia. In addition, the EU also intends to reiterate that formal negotiations on a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement can start as soon as Russia has completed its WTO accession process.

As regards the long-standing problem of Siberian overflight fees, the EU will continue to press for signature of the existing agreement.

In the second common space, which is Freedom, Security and Justice, the EU intends to voice concern about the situation concerning human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Russia, particularly in the context of the recent elections. I should add that this concern is shared by both the Presidency and the European Parliament. The Summit will also provide an opportunity to assess progress with the implementation of visa facilitation and readmission agreements.

Under the third common space, which is External Security, the EU will underline that more concrete actions for further cooperation in the Common Neighbourhood are needed. Above all, we will try to emphasize that Russia must endeavour to find a solution to the conflict in the Transnistrian region and Georgia. At the same time, we should welcome Russia’s participation in the EUFOR Chad operation, and agree on further cooperation within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy.

As for the fourth common space, which is Research, Education and Culture, the Summit should welcome the first Permanent Partnership Council on Research, which took place in Slovenia in May. Finally, the Summit will provide an opportunity to address international issues, such as frozen conflicts, the Middle East, Iran, Afghanistan and others.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to conclude with the following: The summit will place particular emphasis on the endeavours of both sides to ensure the stable and democratic development of countries in the common neighbourhood area. Concrete cooperation between the EU and Russia within the framework of the common neighbourhood is essential to addressing problems of mutual interest and concern, and in particular frozen conflicts.

With this I shall end and I shall listen to your debate with interest.

(Applause)

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner,** Member of the Commission. – Mr President, with a new Russian President in office, as has just been said, and also with our mandate finally in place to negotiate a new agreement with Russia, I think we have an opportunity to redefine this essential partnership with our largest neighbour based on a
number of common interests. Getting the EU-Russia relationship right is one of the most important challenges in European foreign policy: we all know that.

The launch of negotiations will be the centrepiece of the first EU-Russia Summit with President Medvedev in Khanty-Mansiysk at the end of June. Right after that the negotiators will begin the first session of their work.

The new agreement between the EU and Russia gives us the chance to update the legal framework underpinning our relationship so as to reflect the substantial changes in both Russia and the European Union, because we have changed a lot since the current partnership and cooperation agreement was negotiated in the 1990s. I believe it will also help us to unlock the potential of our relationship, because there is huge potential, and to pursue the interests of our Member States much more vigorously.

The hallmarks should be: results-orientated political cooperation, deep economic integration, a level playing field for our energy relations enshrining the principles at least of the Energy Charter Treaty, and ever closer relations in the field of freedom, security and justice, as well as a progressive opening of our educational and scientific systems to each other.

At the same time, we should continue to implement the cooperation with Russia under the four common spaces, which the President-in-Office of the Council has just mentioned, and their road maps. They indeed comprise a wide range of actions giving concrete expression to this strategic partnership.

The new agreement should also provide the legal framework to build on these for the future.

The summit will also be an opportunity to hear at first hand where President Medvedev sees Russia’s priorities with the European Union. I think we always have to look to what he has said, for example in an important Financial Times interview where he said he wants more rule of law in Russia and he also wants a greater modernisation of the Russian economy. Of course, we will judge him by his deeds.

While there will certainly be, at the beginning, strong continuity of policies in Russia, the new President has stressed his commitment to the rule of law and the modernisation of the Russian economy, and I think we should encourage him to match all his words with clear action, and with action that should happen soon.

While we pursue our common interests with Russia, we must nevertheless remain clear and firm on democracy and human rights. We will continue to remind Russia of the commitments that we have both signed up to, notably, for instance, with the Council of Europe and also the OSCE.

We are often close partners with Russia in tackling international challenges, for example as members of the Middle East Quartet – most probably we will again be in Berlin next week – but we also need, as our colleague has said, to see a Russia that pursues a positive agenda with its other neighbours; so it is true that we are concerned that recent Russian moves in Georgia could undermine stability in the region. Therefore during my visit to Moscow some 10 days ago I had a very long conversation with Foreign Minister Lavrov in which I discussed this important issue.

We should gradually establish with Russia a continuous high-level non-confrontational dialogue covering all the aspects of conflict resolution, including peace-keeping and peace mechanism aspects, since Russia indeed will clearly remain an essential actor in any peace efforts regarding the frozen conflicts.

On the other hand, it is natural that Tbilisi is seriously concerned about maintaining its territorial integrity and in the summit discussion on frozen conflicts we will certainly firmly underline that Georgian and Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected; but I think we also need to be pragmatic, realistic and have an inclusive approach from the Georgian side.

In my regular contacts with both Georgia and Russia, I am indeed urging pragmatism and an end to the setting of mutually exclusive conditions: these will not work.

In conclusion, the EU-Russia Summit is a chance to embark on a constructive relationship with the new administration, defending our values and promoting our common interests. I look forward to your input and to the discussion in the House.

(Applause)

Charles Tannock, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Mr President, EU-Russia relations rank as one of the top challenges for the EU and opinions vary widely within this Parliament whether to wield the big stick and
confront the bear or speak softly with a mixture of carrot and stick in dealing with Russia under its new President Medvedev, which rather aptly means ‘bear’ in Russian.

Nevertheless, we must give him the benefit of the doubt on his helpful comments about improving the rule of law, human rights and the fight against corruption – with the EU being more engaged in the strategic partnership and new PCA with what is still the largest country in the world, which now projects renewed confidence due to its mineral-resource-driven trillion-dollar economy.

Priorities for the summit must include energy security as a reliable trading partner for oil and gas but also, with Russia's imminent accession to the WTO, legal certainty for Western natural resource companies in their foreign direct investments in Russia.

Russia must be leant on to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its near neighbours and within the UN help resolve the problems in the Middle East as well as nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea.

Russia plays a key role in the Western Balkans, including resolving the Kosovo question, and should not fear expansion of NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia and could even help improve the repressive political climate in neighbouring Belarus.

There is much to talk about at the Khanty-Mansiysk summit. Let us hope that the new Putin-Medvedev double act will be coming in a genuine spirit of reconciliation with the European Union and not hoping that the ‘no’ vote in Ireland means an end to an EU common front for the 27 Member States vis-à-vis Russia.

Jan Marinus Wiersma, on behalf of the PSE Group. – Mr President, I would like to react to what was said by the President-in-Office and the Commissioner. We also hope that, with a new President in Russia and, finally, a mandate for negotiations on a new contractual arrangement with Russia, we will now enter into a more positive period of cooperation with the Russians.

Over the last 10 years we have seen enormous growth in the interdependence between the European Union and Russia. For that reason, I think it is good to work with them with a clear mandate to define more concretely the work we want to do in the four areas of common spaces as we have been developing over the last few years. Of course, we also want to use the new possibilities to continue – and maybe to intensify – to be partners in the international arena.

We also have to work on creating a secure and transparent framework for energy relations, including, of course, trade, but also improving the investment climate in Russia, where admittance and entry into the WTO could be very helpful.

I also think we have to work together to enable ourselves to work on the problems in the shared neighbourhood. We have already talked about Transnistria and the Caucasus, but we also have to look at how we can find a kind of compromise in the near future on the issue of Kosovo.

We also have to create necessary and effective mechanisms to deal with human rights violations and also – to say it more positively – to help promote the rule of law in Russia.

I would like to make two final remarks. I would like to emphasise, as we have done many times before, that, in order to make these negotiations successful from our side, we have to speak with one voice. I would also like to say – and I have said it before – that we also have to remain somewhat pragmatic. Our leverage is limited: Russia is not a candidate country; it does not want to join the European Union; it is following its own course. It wants to cooperate and not integrate. I think we should take that into account in our dealings and talks with them in the years to come.

Janusz Onyszkiewicz, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (PL) The forthcoming EU-Russia summit will be the first opportunity for leaders of EU Member States to meet with the new Russian authorities appointed after the recent elections. The summit will therefore be an excellent opportunity to become better informed about the direction of Russian policy, and how it might be implemented.

A certain amount of information on what this policy may be like can be gleaned from President Medvedev’s speech in Berlin. It contained a number of hopeful references to combating corruption and governing under the rule of law. The difficulty is that President Putin, Mr Medvedev’s predecessor, said much the same thing at the start of his term, yet we all know how things developed and what the present situation is like. The aforementioned speech also contained a view of the world that differed from the one we would have wished to hear. In the vision of the world presented by Mr Medvedev, the European Union or more accurately, the
Member States of the Union are reduced to the role of mere economic partners of Russia. The latter envisages engaging in political activity in a significantly broader area stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

There is a second issue worthy of mention. It is rather more specific, but urgent, and concerns the relationship between Russia and Georgia. Pursuant to an agreement reached in 1994, Russian troops mandated by the Community of Independent States, an association of post-Soviet countries, are stationed in Abkhazia. Abkhazia is part of Georgia. There is every indication that these troops are not fulfilling a peace-keeping role, and that they are in fact a party in the conflict between Abkhazian separatists and the government of Georgia, as evidenced by the shooting down of a pilotless Georgian aircraft by a Russian one. Pursuant to a recent unilateral decision taken by the Russian authorities alone, these forces have been strengthened significantly.

It would make a great difference if the European Union became involved in resolving this conflict, acting as a trustworthy and reliable entity.

Rebecca Harms, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I am slightly irritated that in the speeches we have heard about the negotiations and the forthcoming discussions, very little has been said about the fact that Europe does not have a united or unanimous position on many issues which will arise in what, to my mind, are important talks with President Medvedev. This applies especially to the whole area of energy policy. In my opinion, it is a serious problem: we talk very frequently about our dependency on oil and gas imports from Russia but we have not devised a common strategy on this issue. Instead, the large Member States, individual Member States, are pursuing their own strategies in this area and no genuinely united European strategy on security of supply has been forged in relation to the agreements with Russia.

The same applies to another very sensitive area as well. I welcome the fact that apart from the issue of Georgia, the other conflicts have also been mentioned, so that when we talk about Georgia, we also include Abkhazia and Ossetia. There is another thing which I thought was missing from the Council's and Commission's introductory statements, namely some comments on how we should now be dealing with these frozen conflicts with Russia following the decision on Kosovo. As Parliament, we need more information about this, and as a member of the delegation which recently visited Moscow, I also have a great deal of interest in the fate of non-governmental organisations in Russia, as they are suffering greatly from a dreadful piece of legislation, and I think that you should put this issue on the agenda as well.

Adam Bielan, on behalf of the UEN Group. – (PL) Mr President, for some time now we have been aware of the Russian company Gazprom’s worrying penchant for collecting former leaders of European Union countries. The best example of this tendency is the case of Mr Schröder, the former German Chancellor. Mr Schröder first signed an agreement with Russia concerning construction of the Nord Stream gas pipeline, and then took a post on the company’s governing board. Similar goings-on are taking place in the south of Europe, in connection with Gazprom’s next venture, namely the South Stream gas pipeline. I should like to emphasise that no Western energy company has as close links with its home state as Gazprom has with the Kremlin. In the case of Gazprom’s plans, we are confronted with cold political calculation. Normal market principles simply do not apply.

It is high time for the Union to realise this and act to prevent a situation in which a State-sponsored company can use gas pipelines to exert political pressure. Russia’s control of energy will inevitably lead to a further increase in the cost of energy in Europe. Russia will also be able to extract even greater political concessions in exchange for supplying gas and oil.

It is quite clear that the European Union has to build good relations with Russia. To do so effectively, however, it must demonstrate unity, a unity we currently lack. I earnestly hope that the forthcoming EU-Russia summit will be an opportunity to demonstrate the European Union’s solidarity in the face of Russia’s hegemony in the energy sector.

Vladimír Remek, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, I am glad to see that the obstacles used by some Member States to block the launch of the discussions with Russia on the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement have finally been overcome. After 18 months, on the eve of the summit, the Commission received the mandate to negotiate with Russia at last. This could be beneficial to both parties but let us not be too optimistic. If our discussions on problems as complex as, for example, energy cooperation, climate change or security issues are conducted from entrenched positions, from which we loudly attack each other with various (often unrealistic) demands, culminating in ultimatums, we will get nowhere. In spite of that, there are some in our midst who still do not understand this. The logical result
then may be a stalemate like in chess. What we need, however, is a new level of relations, fit for the 21st century, and we have the chance to achieve it. I think that we will best serve the interests of the EU citizens by taking advantage of it.

**Bernard Wojciechowski, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.** – Mr President, ‘Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma,’ Churchill once said. The European Union has agreed on what it wants from Russia. The question is, how fast?

Energy politics turns Germany blind to Polish and Lithuanian demands. Nord Stream, Depal – it looks like all pipelines from Russia lead over the heads of central European countries. This is not a pipe dream, as the perestroika guy, Gorbachev, said. The Economist admits that the Baltic pipe was conceived in secret. Lithuanian demands for firmer terms concerning energy seem, therefore, relevant. Many Eurocrats fumed about that to strengthen the view of neurotic post-Communist countries.

On the other hand, Germany’s economy minister threatens that his country will not let the EU Commission dictate decisions in the backrooms in Brussels. He definitely did not mean human rights, I guess.

The initiative of the ‘Eastern Partnership’ launched by Poland and Sweden may be spectacular. Bravery is good, but brains are better.

The partnership between the EU and Russia is uneasy. It will not be successful without Poland, which is Russia’s natural neighbour by land, water and air. It is something that all sides obviously need to take into consideration, especially today when the Treaty of Lisbon was pulled down and its falling bricks may damage whatever stands in its way. Good resolutions are useless attempts if they interfere with sovereign nations.

‘Perhaps there is a key to Russia. That key is Russian national interest,’ Churchill added. The opinion that ‘nothing is impossible in Russia but reform’ seems to be no longer true. Whatever the approach, the EU needs to cooperate with Russia, and vice versa.

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI).** – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as Mr Wojciechowski, the previous speaker, has already said, relations with Russia are extremely delicate and fraught with ambiguity. I understand the attitude of our fellow Members from Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states in particular, who have suffered a great deal from Russian domination in the form of Soviet control and a harsh and oppressive system, which has now happily faded away. I believe that we have to seize this opportunity to establish more friendly relations with the great Russian people who are unquestionably Europeans and in some way are also the gatekeepers of Europe. Russia is confronted with the same problems as us: it is faced with a falling birth rate while at the same time the vast open spaces of Siberia could well prove to be an attractive proposition to the one and a half billion Chinese who believe that part of their territory was taken from them.

I think that the misunderstandings that may exist and persist with Russia, and which it is hoped will be cleared up at the EU-Russia Summit on 14 November, are also partly our responsibility. We hitched our cart to the American political wagon and returned to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – I am speaking for France here – which was a response to the Warsaw Pact. Once the Warsaw Pact disappeared I believe that Russia quite legitimately developed suspicions about our intentions and I would like to see these misunderstandings straightened out on both sides.

**Elmar Brok (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office, given that a number of our fellow Members who are opposed to the Treaty of Lisbon have called for a uniform policy towards Russia, let me refresh your memories: bottles of champagne were opened in Moscow after the result of the Irish vote as it was regarded as further proof of Europe’s weakness, allowing Russia to revert to ‘business as usual’ with individual countries.

I am pleased that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement can now be negotiated, in which we address critical issues such as energy security. It is the Lisbon Treaty which will give us the powers to deal with this issue, along with human rights.

I am sure that just like Chancellor Merkel, the Slovenian Presidency will represent Europe’s interests and that Chancellor Merkel herself, in Sochi, will champion human rights and political interests. I am sure this will be successful, and we must remind Mr Medvedev of what he himself has said, namely that states must be measured according to the development of democracy and the rule of law. We should take his comments seriously.
However, we should also make it clear that we have shared interests with Russia, not only in terms of energy issues, where we need to achieve security of supply. Russia is, after all, a member of the Security Council. How can we halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction unless we get Russia on side, or deal with issues such as Iran, the Middle East and various other areas? We must make that clear. At the same time, however, Russia should not secure too much power via Gazprom. The Russians must be subject to the same rules on competition as everyone else.

Let me make one final comment: if we are seeking to assert our common interests with Russia via a strategic partnership, it must be clear that there is no longer any room for a politics of the 'near abroad' and spheres of influence. In a Europe of independent states, every country must have the right, in accordance with the Helsinki agreement, to join an alliance or not, as it sees fit. No other country has a right of veto over the independent decisions taken by another European country. That needs to be made very clear as well.

Hannes Swoboda (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, there are many of our fellow Members in this House who come from countries with a bad experience of the Soviet Union. The Commissioner and I come from a country which had both good and bad experiences of the defunct Soviet Union. Today’s Russia is reminiscent in some ways of the old USSR. Nonetheless, it is a new Russia and it has new potential.

The task now is to do our utmost to ensure that we achieve a new Russia which no longer reminds us of the Soviet Union of the past. Two things are needed for that: a clear and unequivocal stance, and a willingness to engage in dialogue with this new Russia. On the Kosovo problem, for example, we have a different position from Russia, but we still have to talk to Russia so that we can solve the problems. Neighbourhood policy is another example: we have a different offer to make to the neighbour countries, whereas Russia often still adopts an imperialistic stance towards its ‘near abroad’.

If we want to help these countries, then we must give clear support to countries such as Georgia, for example, but we must also talk to Russia about ways of achieving a peaceful solution to these conflicts, whether we are talking about Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

When it comes to energy issues, we must ensure that we find our own resources; we need a Nabucco pipeline, for example, so that we are in a stronger bargaining position vis-à-vis Russia. Nonetheless, we do need to negotiate with Russia on energy and other issues. My Group and I therefore do not rule out the possibility that we need both these things – a clear and unequivocal position, and an independent policy – so that from this strong position, we are able to engage in negotiations and talks with Russia. I hope that we can achieve our objective.

Henrik Lax (ALDE). – (SV) The energy issue will be important at the summit. The EU needs gas from Russia, and Russia needs export income from Europe. The summit may be crucial in deciding whether the Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany via the Baltic will become a reality.

This project has the potential for serious disruption to the vulnerable ecosystem of the Baltic Sea, but the most serious threat to the project is the lack of trust between Russia and the countries around the Baltic. If the gas pipeline is to become a reality, clear confidence-building measures are needed from two quarters, from Russia and from Germany. Russia must, among other things, ratify the Espoo Convention, which regulates the distribution of responsibilities in transnational projects likely to have an environmental impact in neighbouring countries, and Russia must cease all talk of the Russian navy and military taking part in the construction of the pipeline. That will never be allowed, at least not in Finland’s territorial waters. Germany, for its part, must first recognise that the project affects all the EU’s Member States around the Baltic Sea and is a common EU matter. Germany must also show solidarity with Poland and the three Baltic states and convince them that they will not be discriminated against in their energy supplies as a result of the project. Germany must honour the resolution we are discussing, which says that the EU must be united in its action with respect to Russia in large-scale energy projects. The gas pipeline must not jeopardise the EU internal market. It is the EU and not Gazprom in Russia which has to lay down the rules for trade in energy on the internal market.

Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis (UEN). – (LV) Ladies and gentlemen, the speech by Commissioner Ferro-Waldner leads us to suppose that Parliament’s resolution is an eminent example of political correctness; perhaps even something like a curtsey to Russia’s new President, Mr Medvedev. We should, however, still bear in mind
the fact that Prime Minister Putin – the President and Mr Putin – are really one and the same person, and that he is carrying out a ‘divide and conquer’ policy aimed directly at the EU Member States. Under these circumstances, it is very important for the partnership agreement to be successful. The European Union should not show any weakness. In the talks it must demonstrate the unity of the Member States and its solidarity as a force. It must reduce the inconsistency shown by Russia to date and promote an integrated market and free access to infrastructure and investment in Russia. It must demand that Russia be willing to comply with the requirements of the World Trade Organisation. We need to reinforce the European Union’s unified position on strategic issues in relation to states with undemocratic regimes. The European Union must confirm that it remains a stronghold of democracy and common values.

Sylwester Chruszcz (NI). – (PL) Mr President, the meeting between the representatives of the European Union and Russia in Siberia ought to be a meeting between friends seeking genuine understanding. If we want to improve our relations, we must treat our partner seriously. I have heard it said in the House that the European Union will want to teach Russia about the rules of democracy. However, there is a democratic deficit in Brussels. I have also heard the results of the Irish referendum called into question in this very Chamber.

It has also been said in the House that Members are concerned about the situation in Georgia. Is that not the height of hypocrisy? One day the territorial integrity of Serbia is infringed by recognising Kosovo, and the next the people of Abkhazia are denied the chance of independence and told that a different set of rules applies to their country. Ladies and gentlemen, you must understand that it was Stalin who overcame Abkhazia and integrated it into Georgia. We cannot today become involved in a world we do not understand.

I believe that if we are to deal with the Russians, we need to understand not only their history but also their mentality. Clearly, Russia is currently well governed. Life is getting better for the Russian people, and Russia is becoming a democratic country. There is no justification for the didactic tone adopted by Union officials. All that achieves is an irritated sneer in Moscow.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE-DE). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, it is only by talking to each other that we avoid misunderstandings. Intense discussions with one other are now going to take place because we are opening up the dialogue with the Russian Federation when we start talks on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. It is good that the negotiations are now going to begin. An incredible amount has changed in the last 10 years, both in Russia and in the European Union, but we are also more dependent than ever on one other. That is why good binding agreements on energy, but also on climate change, are necessary for both parties. Mr President, when it comes to these agreements we must also not forget a number of fundamentals. Although some Members may have doubts, now of all times we must work hard for Community values, such as strengthening the rule of law, fighting corruption and stressing the importance of independent social debate in Russia itself.

Mr President, the negotiations will not be easy. A new agreement need not be encyclopaedic, as far as I am concerned, but it must make a number of absolutely essential elements binding on both parties.

Mr President, we cannot wait until the agreement is on the table, because we need to hear positive noises from the Kremlin now on a number of other issues; I am very worried about certain developments: Chechnya, the TNK versus BP case and Abkhazia. I would like to hear from the President what he means exactly by joint action.

Kristian Vigenin (PSE). – (BG) Mr President, Madam Commissioner, colleagues, let me start by saying that the world is a very different place today and the juxtaposition of blocs is a thing of the past. Russia has changed a lot, too. The Russia of June 2008 is very different from the Russia of June 2000, for example. The European Union is faced with the challenge to build and develop a new type of relations for which there is no comparison in the past. We need to develop these relations with the clear understanding that there are much more things that unite us than those that divide us. There are many problems we can solve only in cooperation with Russia. These refer also to global issues such as climate change, combating hunger and pandemics, terrorism. There are others which are regional in their nature yet have an enormous significance for the European Union: energy security, trade and economic links, relations with common neighbours. There are also issue that divide us: human rights, freedom of speech, how we understand democracy and democratic systems. But we need to be pragmatic enough and develop our dialogue not in confrontation but by focusing on our common goals.

It is a fact that in recent years mistrust has built up but now we have the opportunity to start a dialogue with the new Kremlin occupant. I would like to draw your attention to Russia’s role in the Western Balkans. I
István Szent-Iványi (ALDE). – (HU) Mr President, Commissioner, in his inaugural speech President Medvedev declared his loyalty to democracy, saying that he considered restoring the rule of law to be his most important duty. If these are not just empty words and he actually manages to bring this about, then there is a real chance that relations with Russia can be substantially improved. Our expectations are modest, but we are open and optimistic. Having Russia as a stable and reliable partner helping to resolve conflicts that have reached deadlock and helping to prevent nuclear proliferation is in our fundamental interest. We regard Russia as a partner, but they too must decide whether they consider us to be a partner or a set of rivals to be turned against each other and played off against each other. We welcome the intention to establish a new EU-Russia partnership agreement; this agreement should be extended to cover energy issues and should also contain the fundamental principles of the Energy Charter. Europe must take a decisive and united stance at the negotiations if it wants to achieve real results.

I think it is a positive sign that the summit is to be held in the capital of Khanty-Mansi. The World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples is also scheduled to take place there at the same time. I hope that this is not simply a one-off gesture on Russia’s part towards the Finno-Ugric peoples, but that they genuinely intend to improve the situation and guarantee the rights of Finno-Ugric peoples. On this point I would like to ask Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and the Commission to speed up work on implementing the ‘preparatory action’ to assist the Finno-Ugric peoples, because it seems to us that the deficits in this area are enormous. Thank you.

Inese Vaidere (UEN). – (LV) Ladies and gentlemen, Russia’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs has drawn up a comprehensive strategy on how to make use of its fellow countrymen in the European Union, particularly in the Baltic States, in order to strengthen Russia’s political and economic influence. President Medvedev has just signed a decree abolishing entry visas to Russia for non-citizens of Latvia and Estonia, which in essence recognises them as Russian citizens. Thus non-citizens, who, in order to obtain citizenship, only have to learn a little of the local language, will acquire much greater privileges than citizens and they will have less of an incentive to obtain citizenship. This act – like the call to give them the right to vote in local government elections – is a real obstacle to the integration of non-citizens. Russia’s ‘managed democracy’ has announced increasing restrictions on freedom of the press, expression and assembly. Russia’s true democrats have asked for our support on various occasions, both in calls to the Subcommittee on Human Rights and at the time of the visit to Moscow. The planned pragmatism of the resolution has, however, allowed us to forget our principles, even though in practice all economic growth in Russia is based on our payments for energy resources.

Jana Bobošíková (NI). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, the European Union – by which I mean the Council – should clearly define its idea of relations with Russia. It should be clear whether negotiations concerning, for example, gas supplies, Kosovo, freedom of speech and human rights are going to be conducted by individual Member States separately or whether there is a chance to achieve a consensus, at least at a basic level, on some common interests. It is my opinion that it is in the citizens’ interest for the Union to speak with one voice when dealing with Russia. Unfortunately, this is not the case. We should push for the creation of a more stable business and political climate in Russia, one that would involve fewer import barriers and give more room to investors from the Union. This would surely be helped by Russia’s membership of the World Trade Organisation. Of course all of us would have to insist emphatically on respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms as part of such a partnership. The Union, which is a strong manifold entity, and Russia, which is a superpower, should stop behaving like two towns connected by nothing more than a narrow road and a gas pipe. Both should strive for greater mutual economic integration and their partnership should be a marriage of convenience, not a love match.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). – Mr President, when welcoming the words of President Medvedev on the importance of civil rights and rule of law, the EU should make it absolutely clear that the credibility of his statements can be measured only by showing, first of all, full respect for the verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights and contributing to the reform of this body.

The most important starting point in aspiring to better relations is unity amongst the EU Member States. We especially stress the need to give priority to the long-term benefits of a joint position over the possible short-term advantages of bilateral deals on single issues.
These priorities are especially relevant in the field of economics and energy, where the principles of transparency and reciprocity can be the only basis for long-term cooperation, together with equal access to markets, infrastructure and investment.

**Reino Paasilinna (PSE).** – (FI) Mr President, Commissioner, I have before me a study produced this year on Russian businessmen. Surprisingly, they have similar thoughts to us. What sort of Russia would they like to see by 2020? Between 50% and 70% of them want Russians to be free, secondly educated, thirdly integrated, fourthly respectful of the law, and fifthly in good health. There are no bad intentions here by any means. Only 30% of these businessmen hoped to be rich. There is therefore no longer any question of the sort of oligarchies that we all remember.

It is Russia’s intention to modernise, and this goal is common to the country’s leaders and the people. The concerns of the businessmen interviewed are familiar to us: 70% of them think that the ageing population is a big worry, the same as we do. As far as corruption in high places is concerned, here it is at a lower rate, but there it is very common. More than 50% think that the independence of the judiciary and civil rights are important. Poor levels of education are also a worry. We can set an example and provide assistance where there is poor infrastructure and rigid bureaucracy. That is why I think we have an opportunity, now that we are dependent on Russia for energy, to offer our expertise to promote the country’s modernisation, which is their objective.

**Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner spoke of the importance of getting the relationship between the EU and Russia right.

One area that is particularly important, it seems to me, is the question of civil society. Does she envisage the possibility of launching some specific programmes or projects that we might begin to consider in terms of university exchanges, cultural and artistic exchanges, and, if so, what?

I think it is worth repeating our disappointment in this context. The British Council offices in St Petersburg and Ekaterinburg were closed, against all normal diplomatic practice.

It is also worth reflecting on the energy relationship. As a good customer, we are in a strong situation. Gazprom has quite clearly failed to convince this Parliament, in the Committee on Foreign Affairs, in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, and in the Committee on Petitions. They need to think again. We need a good relationship where we are not naive, where we do not rely on wishful thinking and where our Russian partners and colleagues are not suspicious, and do not feel threatened or that they need to show aggression.

**Adrian Severin (PSE).** – Mr President, the next European Union-Russia summit will take place between a Russian Federation on the rise – be it only provisionally – and an EU not only affected by the Irish ‘no’ on the Lisbon Treaty but, moreover, by the lack of a clear vision on how to get out of this crisis.

Russia itself is a divisive issue in the European Union. Actually, it divided us into ideologists and pragmatists; into confrontational geo-strategists and conciliatorists; into old Cold War fighters and new utilitarian opportunists.

On the other hand, a major problem is that Russia does not have a European Union policy but prefers to deal with each member of the Union separately. We will not be able to change this situation before we put in place a true common European policy for Russia. We must tell Russia that, in order to be able to do good business with us and benefit from the mutual opening of the markets, one needs an institutional and political interoperability guaranteeing the separation between economic policies and geo-political strategies.

Therefore, a common space of justice, freedom and security characterised by transparency, accountability and openness is needed.

**Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE-DE).** – (ES) Mr President, the relationship between the European Union and Russia should be a constructive one, but should also be a demanding one. Like us, it is a member of the Council of Europe and must thus respect its principles and values.

I welcome the fact that President Medvedev has recently emphasised the importance of human rights and the rule of law.
The European Union and Russia have the potential to have a strong relationship and we are now facing the challenge of negotiating the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which will enable us to make faster progress on the so-called ‘four common spaces’.

I wish to highlight the importance of one of these spaces: economic relations. More than half of Russia’s trade is conducted with the Union. The creation of an integrated market, with transparent and non-discriminatory rules, will enhance and diversify the economic and trade relations between Russia and the European Union. Greater legal certainty in Russia is also essential.

Ladies and gentlemen, Moscow is a key player on the international stage. A permanent member of the Security Council, its cooperation is crucial in order to achieve peace and stability in Europe and throughout the world.

As far as the EU is concerned, the 27 Member States need to adopt a united front in their relations with Russia. All of the analysts, most recently Mark Leonard in an interesting study, stress that the absence of a common position is damaging to the Union...

(Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Mr President, the imminent summit resolves the deadlock that has lasted more than a year and a half, and will hopefully bring about substantive progress in relations between the European Union and Russia. The European Union needs Russia, but let there be no mistake, Russia needs Europe at least as much, as an economic partner and as an energy consumer. We depend on each other in the field of energy and in many other matters. For this reason, I believe that fears relating to increasing Russian influence are exaggerated, although numerous statements by the Russian leadership seem to justify them. In the interests of the future development of strategic relations between the EU and Russia, it is vital to establish a reciprocal visa-free travel regime as soon as possible; this is crucial for progress in EU-Russian relations. In conclusion, as President of the Finno-Ugric forum in the European Parliament, I would like to repeat the request made by my fellow Member Mr Szent-Iványi to the EU Heads of State participating in the summit: please support the Finno-Ugric peoples. Thank you for your attention.

(Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I also take the view that the pipeline between Germany and Russia should only be built if the other EU Member States concerned agree. However, those Member States should not then negotiate with another major power, namely the US, on missiles or visas. Europe will only be able to stand firm vis-à-vis the US and Russia if it finally adopts a united front.

Let me make one thing very clear: it is our job to tell the Russians that it is in their fundamental interests to build a good partnership with Europe. However, this means that they cannot speak on behalf of other countries that Russia happens to have occupied in the past, such as Ukraine or Georgia. These countries are sovereign states and are entitled to make their own decisions about their own destiny.

Mr Medvedev said in Berlin that he wants to see an improvement in relations. That being the case, he can start on two fronts. The first is the rule of law, which means taking action in the matter of the Yukos prisoners. The second and very important area is this: Mr Medvedev, please stop blocking the largest peace mission in the history of the EU, namely the Kosovo mission!

(Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, the complex relationship between the European Union and Russia calls for well-handled and cohesive diplomatic action. The forthcoming summit between the European Union and Russia has generated strong emotions, as agreements of great importance for both the European Union and Russia are to be negotiated there. Amongst other issues, the Union must strive to ensure energy security for Europe. At a time when fuel and energy prices are constantly rising, energy security is of strategic significance for the economy of the entire European Union and also for the domestic economies of its Member States.

On the eve of the EU-Russia summit, we need to understand how important it is for the future of the Union to speak with a single voice on the international arena. In that connection, it is unfortunate that the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty is now uncertain. The latter contains provisions that would make the European Union a strong partner in international relations. I am glad the Union supported Poland in its dispute with Russia over the export of our products. I am confident that Poland will in future years help to develop a positive relationship between Russia and the European Union.

(Josef Zieleniec (PPE-DE). – (CS) This EU-Russia summit will be the first for Russian President Dmitri Medvedev. The Union should make use of the start of his term of office and strive for a shift in mutual relations towards a pragmatic, realistic and strategic partnership. Actually, in the long run this partnership is more
important for Russia itself. President Medvedev’s priority is for the rule of law to be respected (as he says himself) and the economy modernised. To achieve this, he needs Europe. In the area of international and trade relations, Russia also needs a partner that is more stable and reliable than China or Iran. The European Union presents no threat to Russia. On the contrary, the Union can help Russia to maintain its status of a key player that the country would otherwise gradually lose due to elements relating to its one-sided economy and democracy. A strategic partnership, however, can only be built on the basis of a symmetrical dialogue between equals. In this context, Russia must show the way, stop its petty attempts at dividing Europe and treat the Union as a collective entity. Short-sighted skirmishes and provocations needlessly postpone the creation of a real partnership with the EU. In the discussions on the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Russia, the focus should be on the issues that are important in the long term.

Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE). - (SK) The EU-Russia strategic partnership is an important factor in the area of diversification and security of imports of energy sources into the EU. At the same time, we have to remember that this cooperation is as important for Russia as it is for the EU, since up to 60% of Russian crude oil goes to the EU.

I think that the European leaders have to keep telling Russia that the country should not use her energy supplies as a tool of political repression, in relation to EU Member States or the countries of the former Soviet Union, especially Ukraine.

At present, Member States’ negotiations on supplies of Russian oil and gas are bilateral. When visiting the State Duma of the Russian Federation in April 2007, I could see for myself that Russia, too, is extremely interested in negotiating energy issues with the EU as a whole.

Finally, I would like to express my fears, like my colleague Mr Elmar Brok did, that following the unsuccessful Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty the EU’s position as a strategic partner may be weakened, given that the Lisbon Treaty is the document in which the EU’s competences in the area of the common energy policy are enshrined.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, hopefully we will soon conclude the cooperation agreement between the European Union and Russia. It is important that the EU and Russia have a straightforward, workable and honest relationship. The partnership needs to be healthy and beneficial to both parties.

Despite its pragmatic approach, the EU should not forget, and it has not forgotten either, human rights, and should aim for an active dialogue with Russia on the subject.

Energy security is an important issue all over Europe, and when we speak of energy we are also normally talking about Russia and cooperation between the EU and Russia. The EU is keen to maintain its security of supply, at the same time cutting its dependence on external energy. Hopefully, the debate at the summit will be open, frank and, above all, fruitful.

Milan Horáček (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, as Mr Swoboda was speaking, I was reminded that ‘svoboda’ is the Russian word for ‘freedom’, and it occurred to me that freedom is of course something that we all need. Human rights and freedom are the EU’s most important pillars and must underpin our dialogue with Russia too.

Precisely because this next dialogue will be taking place in Siberia, it occurs to me that Chita – the detention facility where the Yukos prisoners, Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev, and indeed others, are being held – is also in Siberia. I would therefore ask you to do your utmost to ensure that they are released, but also to encourage Russia to make freedom of opinion and freedom of the press a reality and allow NGOs to work unhindered, as all these aspects are extremely important for our common European future.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, we are a Community that respects the rule of law as one of the foundations on which we have built our identity. We should expect the same from our political and economic partners. I call upon the European Union’s representatives at the summit to raise the matter of full compliance by Russia with the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights.

This Court was not established to be a phoney institution, whose rulings were only respected by those committing minor and sometimes questionable infringements of human rights. It was established to ensure that torturers, rapists and murderers would be deterred from committing further offences by the knowledge that the appropriate sentences would be handed down to them.
The Russian Federation must therefore work very closely with the Court, and must respect the Court's judgments. Clearly, a country that does not honour the agreements it makes cannot be treated a reliable partner. Russia's actions are in stark contrast to its statements that it is a reliable supplier of sources of energy. This is one of the assertions Russian diplomats love to make. If Russia is going to prove as reliable as it did regarding Chechnya, Mrs Politovskaya or Mr Litvinienko, the European Union will go down in history as the most naïve institution that ever existed.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). – Mr President, I raise an issue on behalf of Mrs Marina Litvinenko, whose husband, Alexander Litvinenko, was murdered in London in December 2006. The murder weapon was polonium-210, a radioactive material, 97% of which is manufactured in the Avangard nuclear facility in Russia. The murder has all the hallmarks of a highly sophisticated assassination, such as those carried out by the Russian security services. The chief suspect in the case, Mr Andrei Lugovoi, is a Member of the Russian Parliament and cannot be extradited under the Russian Constitution.

If I may address myself to Mrs Ferrero-Waldner directly: Mrs Litvinenko asks that the Council and the Commission raise the issue of Mr Litvinenko's murder with President Medvedev during the summit. Mrs Litvinenko wants the murder of her husband to be solved and those concerned brought to justice. The summit is an ideal opportunity to move that process forward. Please assist her.

(Applause)

Vytautas Landsbergis (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I continue in the vein of the previous speaker's remarks. The Russian Government should do everything in its power to prove that it did not order the terrorist assassination of a British citizen – which also means a European citizen – Alexander Litvinenko. As the Russian Government has failed to prove that it is not giving the orders and even refuses due cooperation with the British investigating authorities, this shows, consequently, that Russia's official involvement in the murder is politically proved.

The new Russia, as many say, is repeatedly acting like a terrorist state, and at the summit in Khanty-Mansiysk the EU must call on President Medvedev to put a stop to such practices.

The mothers of Beslan, trying to find out who ordered the attack on the school and the use of bazookas and heavy machine guns against everybody there, including their children, should not have court cases initiated against them. The EU must at least support those weaker than itself, the British Government and the Beslan mothers.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) I shall be very brief in view of the late hour. I think it was Mr Severin who said – I shall quote this in English – ‘Russia is a divisive issue in the European Union’. Nevertheless I think that during today's debate in this Parliament I heard above all two elements of very broad consensus, very broad.

Firstly, that we need good relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation. I can only agree with this, of course. The Russian Federation, as has been said several times, is a world power, one of the key players in the international scene, as Mr Millán Mon said, and it is moreover our neighbour. In short, we are condemned to coexist with the Russian Federation, and this coexistence will be high-quality only if it is based on partnership and cooperation. This Presidency is determined to cultivate dialogue towards enhancing this partnership and cooperation, a dialogue that includes all issues of interest to both sides, including those over which we do not agree and about which I spoke in my introductory speech.

The other important element of very broad consensus, which I have discerned here in this Chamber, is the importance ascribed by MEPs to the common position of the European Union. Here I could not agree more. The area where this has been especially highlighted and most frequently highlighted is the area of energy. The fact is that no individual Member State could achieve in separate talks with suppliers like the Russian Federation as good an agreement as the Union as a whole can achieve. It is therefore high time for the common European energy policy to come truly to life.

In this context mention was also made of gas and oil pipelines. May I say just this: if in the European Union we had been capable hitherto of establishing a true, proper internal energy market, it would be entirely immaterial where some gas or oil pipeline ran.

Allow me to conclude with the following remark: the Slovenian Presidency is delighted that its Presidency is ending with the EU-Russian Federation summit, a summit which this time, owing to certain new
circumstances, a new president in Russia and the mandate that we finally succeeded in obtaining after lengthy negotiations, promises much, and I hope that these expectations will be fulfilled.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission.** Mr President, I think that the key in our relationship is mutual interdependence, which many speakers have mentioned. On the one hand, it is in our interests to have a good relationship with Russia, a strategic partner and a neighbour, as our President rightly said. However, it is also important that Russia should be a partner in the solution of problems and not a partner for problems, and that is the other part of it.

I have listened very carefully and I have taken note of all your comments. I will not be able to answer all your questions and comments now, but let me make a few general and more specific remarks.

Firstly, Russia is today a very important energy partner and, as a result of getting the negotiating mandate for the new agreement, we already have a common EU position on energy, because we have a common mandate. It was not easy to get the mandate, but now we have it and this is the framework of our negotiations. Therefore, it was very important to get it. As I said before, we want to enshrine the principles of the Energy Charter in the new agreement. The EU-Russia relationship is based on that – it is not a one-way street. We are an important market and a source of investment, just as Russia is a very important supplier to us. So, again, this interdependence is there and we have to have the same principles: reciprocity, transparency and non-discrimination.

One of the objectives of the European Union energy policy is to diversify routes of supply and sources of energy to increase competition and security in the EU energy market. This is not an anti-Russian policy. I think Russia will remain a key supplier to us, but any rational consumer spreads risks, particularly with energy prices skyrocketing. Given our growing interdependence on imports, particularly gas, the volume of Russian gas that we would like to buy is likely to grow, so we need a clear policy of diversification.

Let me turn to trade in general. It is very important that Russia becomes a member of the WTO. This is important not only for Russia but also for us. We will continue, therefore, to work actively in Geneva and bilaterally to get a deal. I think Russia needs membership of the WTO to modernise its economy, and with this President I am sure that is possible, as it was also possible with President Putin, who, himself, supported this issue.

Let me quickly mention NGOs and human rights issues: we are in regular contact with Russian NGOs and we reflect their concerns in our talks with the Russian authorities. We are ready to raise specific cases, where necessary, and we continue to support them financially through our European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.

On the question of human rights in general: we hold human rights consultations with the Russians. Indeed, we speak about specific cases, human rights defenders, and sometimes about judicial cases. Our particular concerns relate to the situation in the Northern Caucasus. I only have five minutes and I could speak at length about the Northern Caucasus, Georgia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and also on Nagorno-Karabakh and Moldova, so please do not take it that we did not know. This will be very important and is important.

I also wanted to say on the issue of the British Council that the EU has supported the UK Government in its dispute with Russia concerning the British Council offices in St Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. I think we now have a good dialogue on cultural cooperation with Russia, which I hope will provide an opportunity to emphasise the value of these contacts. We will, of course, consider whether anything more can be done.

Concerning the Finno-Ugric minorities: as you know, we are working on the implementation of the preparatory action for EUR 2.5 million, which Parliament put into the budget for this year and we see in this context implementation of the Council of Europe convention on minority rights, to which Russia is also a party. I think it should also cover national minorities in Russia.

Concerning university exchanges: I would just say that we promote such exchanges with Russia through, on the one hand, the Erasmus Mundus and the Tempus Programmes. We will be increasing our cooperation in those programmes in the coming years. In addition, Russia has also shown great interest in being a member of the Seventh Research and Development Framework Programme, which perhaps in future will be a very important sign for SIGMA. We have a European Studies Institute and we – both Russia and the European Union – might go on to work with this Institute and maybe even double our input.
A last general word before concluding: the official launch of this new agreement is, as I think everybody here would agree, a very important occasion and it is an opportunity. There is huge potential and I totally agree with our presidency that this will be a very important occasion.

We know that the negotiations will not be easy. They have to be comprehensive and because they are comprehensive – because we have a huge mandate – they will be somewhat complex and they will not be finished soon. However, this solid mandate also shows that we have a unity there. The unity of the mandate is there. It was very difficult to get it, but now that we have it, let us move forward and I urge you to back us on that.

Finally, as we all know, the relationship has to be strategic. Let us, therefore, take a step back from the daily irritants and the news from the wires and let us look at the broader historical context of Europe and Russia, as well as at the many interests we have in common. We have to find a way to manage our divergences while, at the same time, keeping a door open for dialogue. There is an opportunity. We have to take it, and together I am sure we will get a solid partnership out of that.

President. – I have received six motions for a resolution [2] pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Ramona Nicole Mănescu (ALDE), in writing. – (RO) The EU/Russia Summit to take place on 26/27 June in Khanty-Mansiisk, Siberia, marks a double beginning: on the one hand, it is the first contact that the European Union has with the new Russian President, Dimitry Medvedev, and, on the other hand, the negotiation of a new Partnership Agreement is intended, which would establish the framework for the development of relations between the European Union and Russia.

Since 40% of the natural gas imported by European companies comes from Russia, the latter has to facilitate the EU investments by adopting a transparent legislation and opening its pipeline system, which would allow European companies to purchase gas directly from the Central Asian producers.

The European Union must not remain indifferent to the fate of those who live in conflict regions; together with Russia and the other actors involved, we need to find a way to solve “frozen” conflicts, as well as the conflict in Moldova and the Caucasus.

I hope the Partnership Agreement will be a framework in which the relations between the European Union and Russia shall evolve; nevertheless, we should not forget that our objective is not to sign a Partnership Agreement, but to include into this agreement clauses that could lead to democracy, security and an increase in the standard of living in Europe, from the Caucasus to the Atlantic.

Katrin Saks (PSE), in writing. – (ET) Mr President, this week in Khanty-Mansiysk the regular summit meeting between the European Union and Russia is taking place, to be followed by the 5th World Congress of Finno-Ugrian Peoples in the same place. Among the Finno-Ugrian peoples are the original inhabitants of this region, the Khanty and Mansi reindeer herders who have given their name to this place, situated amidst the Siberian marshes and tundra.

Also attending this World Congress is a five-member delegation from the European Union; the Hungarians, the Finns and the Estonians are among the Finno-Ugrian peoples, and their original home is in Siberia. I hope that we will succeed in this way in drawing attention to the small nations whose language is in danger of disappearing and whose culture, thousands of years old, is being replaced by corporate events.

The European Union should stay true to its values and defend them, and not let itself be blinded in a region which is the source of most of Russia’s energy resources. The rivers of oil there have led to a conflict between the traditional way of life of the native inhabitants and humanity’s ever increasing need for petroleum.

14. Question Time (Council)

President. – The next item is Question Time (B6-0161/2008).

The following questions are addressed to the Council.

Question No 1 by Robert Evans (H-0342/08)

Subject: Passengers with reduced mobility

What action and monitoring has the Council been undertaking to ensure that the provisions set out in my report concerning the rights of persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air (3), which came into force last summer, are being properly implemented across all Member States?

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) The rules regarding the protection and provision of assistance to persons with disability and those with reduced mobility in air transport are laid down by the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air. This regulation was adopted in 2006, some parts already started to apply in July 2007, and the rest will be applied from July this year.

I should stress that monitoring the proper implementation of this regulation is the responsibility of the European Commission, which may adopt appropriate measures. Such measures can include legal remedies to ensure that Community law in this area is correctly applied. For this reason the Council is simply not competent to respond to this question.

Nevertheless I would emphasise that the European Union is aware of the importance of the area of protection and ensuring assistance to disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility. As may be seen in practice, the regulation I mentioned is already being applied and represents an important facility for disabled persons and those with reduced mobility when travelling.

Robert Evans (PSE). – Thank you to the Presidency but obviously I am aware of all the legislation because I was the rapporteur who steered it through this House.

In fact it is the national agencies who are responsible. I do not know the situation in all the countries but in the United Kingdom it is the Civil Aviation Authority. So these are national agencies and it is the responsibility of the national governments, which is why I posed the question to the Council.

In a week when Europe is clearly struggling to convince all its half a billion citizens of the real value of the European Union, this is a worthwhile initiative. This is very important legislation to support disabled people and passengers of reduced mobility so I urge the Minister to go back to the Council and say to all his 26 colleagues on the Transport Council and the members that they should enforce this legislation.

Emanuel Jardim Fernandes (PSE). – (PT) Following on from the question by my colleague Robert Evans, I should like to ask the Council about its readiness to strengthen the rights of passengers with reduced mobility in the maritime sector. I ask this because the Commission has previously defended this possibility, for example in the 2005 communication on passenger rights, and Parliament has been working towards this, in particular within the competences and discussions on the Erika III package.

Jörg Leichtfried (PSE). – (DE) I have a question for the Minister. I have heard that when it comes to the airlines’ treatment of passengers with restricted mobility, there are indeed discrepancies, and that the so-called ‘low-cost’ airlines leave something to be desired here compared with other airlines. I would be interested to know whether the Council has any hard facts available on this issue, or whether these are simply individual perceptions of the situation.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) With regard to the additional question from Mr Fernandes: of course I cannot rule out the possibility of something similar being introduced for disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility travelling by sea. Of course this is a matter that must be studied primarily by the Commission, which should then come up with a proposal. However, it is surely an idea worthy of consideration. This is my off-the-cuff response.

Mr Leichtfried mentioned budget carriers. I should stress that the regulation I mentioned and which relates to facilitating air travel by disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility relates to all carriers and there is no distinction here. Infringements will of course be dealt with equally, irrespective of whether they involve budget or other types of carriers.

**President.** – Question No 2 by **Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou** (H-0346/08)

Subject: Common immigration policy and illegal working

What is the Presidency’s assessment of the progress made during its six-month term of office towards a common immigration policy with a view to a crackdown on illegal working?

**Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (SL) Regarding immigration policy and illegal work during this term of office, that is during the Slovenian Presidency, the Presidency continued negotiations in the Council and with the European Parliament on a draft directive providing sanctions against employers of third country citizens residing illegally in the European Union.

This directive prohibits the employment of third country citizens who reside illegally in the Union, and this is of course one of the methods of combating illegal immigration. To this end the directive lays down minimum common sanctions and measures that Member States must apply against employers that employ third-country citizens who are in the territory of Member States illegally.

During this time the competent bodies of the Council have been continuing to study the proposal, and close contacts have been established with the European Parliament with the aim of the two institutions reaching a common position. Work is not yet finished, but I can say that the Presidency is satisfied with the progress made thus far.

**Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE).** – (EL) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, I thank you for your answer. We know, however, that third-country nationals entering European territory without supporting or legal documentation do in fact work for various employers after being released from detention. They can then earn their fares and travel to European countries where their right of residence will be recognised. How do we deal with illegal employment when it is partly justified and safeguarded?

**Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (SL) When the aforementioned directive is adopted, it will also no doubt be possible to act in these cases, and I hope that this will be as soon as possible. In any event this involves action aimed at employing persons who are in the territory of European Union Member States illegally, and this will of course be contrary to the directive, if and when it is adopted. I repeat, the Council expects this to be as soon as possible, and we also take the view that in these six months considerable progress has been achieved.

**President.** – Question No 3 by **Marian Harkin** (H-0350/08)

Subject: Patient safety

Given that the EU has for many decades taken an active role in ensuring the mobility of workers, does the Council agree that patient safety is an important issue that has not been adequately addressed by EU directives? In particular, does the Council agree that, in order to ensure patient safety throughout the EU, a system of information-sharing between Member States and their regulatory bodies for healthcare professionals needs to be put in place?

**Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (SL) May I thank Mrs Harkin very much for her question. This is an important issue, as has been confirmed by the 18-month Presidency programme we prepared together with Germany and Portugal. In the programme we emphasised that patient safety is an important area.

To this end the Working Group for Patient Safety at the High-Level Group for Health Services and Medical Care drew up a report on improving the safety of patients in the European Union. Within the context of these recommendations, the education and training of health workers was highlighted as one of the main areas.

The recommendations also indicate the need to promote multidisciplinary education on patient safety at all levels of health worker education. The Working Group also recommended that one way of achieving patient safety is to use a single united umbrella network, known as the EUNetPass, which will support Member States and will enable cooperation in the area of patient safety on the European Union level.
The Commission financed two projects at European level, and these should contribute to a better understanding of the situation and the formulation of guidelines for future work in the area of patient safety. These are the projects MARQuIS – ‘Methods of Assessing Response to Quality Improvement Strategies’ – and SIMPATIE – ‘Safety Improvement for Patients in Europe’.

Patient safety was also on the agenda of the June Council of Ministers. This month, on 10 June, the Council adopted decisions in the area of antimicrobial resistance. In these decisions it supports the development of strategies aimed at responsible use of antimicrobial agents. The spread of bacteria resistant to antimicrobial medication is most commonly a consequence of inappropriate use across the entire healthcare system.

Activities related to preventing the further appearance of resistant pathogens are also important. These activities include establishing an effective system of control among Member States, and in addition to this health workers need to be better informed about this.

At the last meeting of health ministers, at the aforementioned June session, the Commission provided information on the package in the area of patient safety. This is the ‘Patient Safety Package’ and in this relation the Commission reported that it intends by the end of 2008 to submit a special report on patient safety and a proposal for a recommendation on patient safety and the prevention and control of infection. As soon as these documents are available, the Member State holding the Presidency will of course apprise the Council.

Finally I should also mention the directive of the European Parliament and the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications. This regulates very precisely the area of professional qualifications of healthcare professionals in order to protect European Union citizens, and it defines the area of cooperation among Member States in this field.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – I thank the President-in-Office for his reply. I am pleased to hear of the progress that has been made in the last six months, in particular with the patient safety working group.

My particular concern here was that, while we have the mobility of health-care workers, we do not have in place at EU level a recognised structure that provides for formal collaboration between the regulators of health care professionals and health services.

Would the Minister not agree that we need to put in place, at EU level, a recognised structure that provides for formal collaboration between these regulators? Because without that coherence and without that structure, individual regulators cannot guarantee patient safety; so I would like to hear his comments on that.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Just a supplementary to that: we also have the mobility of patients throughout the European Union, people who go on holidays and have operations done – with some dreadful consequences.

How is this to be tackled so that people, first of all, are aware of the problems and, then, that they are prevented by having properly qualified health-care professionals that are tracked throughout the system?

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) With regard to organisation at EU level I mentioned the EUNetPass network, which is one of the recommendations provided by the aforementioned Working Group for Patient Safety, and specifically that the EUNetPass network would be one of possibly several ways, but one of the ways of achieving patient safety.

So what does this network involve? It is a network for information exchange, it offers support to recommendations on patient safety in various ways and it is primarily a platform for cooperation and networking among Member States and international organisations in the area of patient safety. This network develops a positive culture of safety, it introduces education and training of health workers and introduces reporting mechanisms and learning by example. It is, however, one of the ways, and of course others are possible including the kind mentioned by you.

President. – Question No 4 by Bernd Posselt (H-0352/08)

Subject: Subsidiarity and EU membership

In a number of Member States, but above all in candidate countries, political parties and the media repeatedly claim that the introduction of ‘same-sex marriages’ or civil partnerships or the liberalisation of laws on abortion and euthanasia are compulsory on the basis of EU law and/or the acquis communautaire.
Can the Council clearly state whether and to what extent these claims are accurate or whether all these issues are purely national matters and/or are covered by the subsidiarity principle?

**Janez Lenarčič**, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) I should point out that the Community – and I believe that Mr Posselt will be aware of this – is not competent to impose on the Member States a requirement that they must introduce ‘same-sex marriages’ or ‘civil partnerships’ into their national legislation. The Community may merely adopt provisions governing cooperation between the judicial authorities of the Member States, for example provisions on court judgments which are recognised or enforced by one State but were adopted in another.

The Community may also adopt provisions on the resolution of conflict of laws in situations displaying cross-border elements. The existing Community provision – namely the Brussels IIa Regulation – does not refer to regulations on same-sex partnerships. As we know, the Member States have very different legislative solutions as regards the rights and obligations arising from same-sex partnerships. Some have partnerships of this kind and some have none at all regulated by the law.

Since the introduction of same-sex marriages and civil partnerships is not required under Community law, it would be difficult for the Member States to reach a consensus on amending existing provisions to include same-sex partnerships. I should also point out that the Community is not competent to regulate matters concerning abortion and euthanasia.

**Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE).** – (DE) I thank the Council for that important clarification as this matter also featured largely in Ireland. I would just like to ask a brief, clear, additional question concerning Croatia. Is it also true that the applicant countries do not have to amend their legislation on these matters but rather continue to be sovereign because this is not an area of EU competence in relation to the applicant countries as well?

**Marian Harkin (ALDE).** – I thank the Council for its reply and I agree that all these matters – same-sex marriages, civil partnerships etc. – should be within the remit of Member States only. However, one of the issues that arose during the Lisbon debate in Ireland was the issue of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. I just want to ask the Minister whether he has a view as regards the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which was annexed to the Lisbon Treaty. At that time it was claimed in Ireland that this Charter could facilitate the introduction of same-sex marriages, abortion, euthanasia etc. I just want to ask the Minister if he has a view on that.

**Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE).** – My question is along the same lines as Marian Harkin’s question. One Member of this House circulated a leaflet saying that if the Lisbon Reform Treaty was passed in Ireland euthanasia and abortion would be introduced – a leaflet which contained a syringe, if you don’t mind! The same Member had the audacity to stand up in this House today and talk about truth and honesty.

I want the Minister to tell this House clearly that, in the event of the Lisbon Treaty being passed, it is clear that it would not introduce abortion and euthanasia in any Member State.

**Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (SL) Thank you very much for these additional questions. First of all as regards Mr Posselt’s question as to whether all this means that the applicant countries – whether Croatia or any other – do not have to amend their legislation on same-sex marriages, abortion or euthanasia, the answer is YES. They do not have to. They do not have to because it is not a matter which falls within the competence of the Community. Therefore, in these cases the legislation of the applicant countries is not examined since it is not a competence of the Community which the applicant wishes to join.

As regards the Charter of Fundamental Rights, my answer to the additional questions from Mrs Harkin and Mr Mitchell is as follows:

The Lisbon Treaty contains an article governing the legally binding nature of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is a separate document. However, I can nevertheless confirm publicly, here and now, that implementation of the Lisbon Treaty would not impose on any Member State any requirements with regard to issues such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriages. These are matters which do not fall within the competence of the Community and implementation of the Lisbon Treaty would not change this. These matters, issues and areas would remain within the competence of the individual Member States.
President. - Question No 5 by Dimitrios Papadimoulis (H-0358/08)

Subject: World food supply crisis

The soaring prices of staple foods such as wheat, rice, maize, etc. have caused a supply crisis and social unrest in many developing countries, whilst Europe too has seen a dramatic rise in food prices.

In the Council's view, what are the reasons for the dramatic rise in international prices for staple foods? What measures will it take to encourage the production of staple foods or, possibly, discourage the production of other commodities (e.g. biofuel)?

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. - (SL) The Council is fully aware of the importance of the issue of agricultural product and food prices in world markets. The Presidency believes that an integrated approach is needed to resolve this problem, an approach that will include all relevant sectors in order to ensure an effective and long-term political response from the European Union. With regard to the various aspects of this issue, recently in the relevant formations of the Council we have organised numerous discussions aimed at contributing to such integrated solutions.

For instance, on 19 May the Council held a detailed discussion on factors influencing the capacity of the agriculture sector to ensure adequate food supply. Here it pointed out the need to study long-term trends in supply and demand. The discussion, aimed at contributing to a common and sustainably orientated political response from the European Union, touched upon all the main aspects that are important for the agriculture sector and for the common agricultural policy.

The Council has already adopted a decision on numerous measures to mitigate the pressure on food prices in the markets of the European Union. These measures are also expected to have a favourable influence on international markets. The Council also adopted certain rapid measures such as abolishing the requirement for compulsory set-aside for 2008, increasing milk quotas and the temporary waiving of import duties for grain.

In the context of the health check on the common agricultural policy the Council will also consider further measures. These include for instance the permanent abandoning of the requirement for compulsory set-aside, the gradual withdrawal of the system of milk quotas, elimination of the current premiums for energy plants and their substitution to promote the production of second-generation biofuels – in other words biofuels that are produced from by-products and are not competing with food production.

At the end of May the Council focused on the developmental dimensions of this issue and determined that such circumstances, the current circumstances, seriously burden developing countries, and especially the weakest social segments of those countries.

In its meeting on 3 June the Council also studied the financial consequences and possible solutions in the area of high food prices. It drew attention to the short-term measures it has already adopted, especially in agriculture, and stressed the importance of strengthening the market orientation of agriculture, ensuring the sustainable production of biofuels and increasing the growth of medium-term and long-term productivity in agriculture both in Europe and in developing countries.

The European Council meeting starting tomorrow will also address the political consequences of high food prices. In short, if I may conclude, the question posed by Mr Papadimoulis has in recent months and weeks been regularly on the Council's agenda.

Dimitrios Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, you have read out a diplomatic text couched in the usual generalisations and wooden language of diplomats. I ask you: at the Summit Conference tomorrow, as well as utter fine words, will you adopt any specific measures, and what would these be regarding the rules and regulations to reduce speculation over fuel and foods? Will you support lower social income? Will you re-examine the continuing policy of shrinkage imposed on agriculture? Lastly, do you think the Irish ‘no’ vote a few days ago is unconnected with high prices and everyday life?

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – This is a global issue and what we do in the health check on agriculture in Europe is important but it is small. What sort of dialogue have we with the US, where 25% of their corn is eaten by cars rather than cattle? Surely that is a huge issue which needs to be addressed.
I would like to explain to Mr Papadimoulis that the European Council does not adopt specific measures. The European Council provides guidelines for action. Specific measures are adopted at Council level and here the Council is active and functional. I mentioned and listed a range of measures that the Council has already adopted. I also listed a range of measures that the Council is expected to address but has not yet done so. So I cannot accept the accusation that these are just words, because I was speaking about specific measures already adopted and those that will be addressed at Council level, primarily the Agriculture Council and also the Economic and Financial Affairs Council.

The question of the United States of America and its method of obtaining biofuels. This is of course a subject of dialogue between the European Union and the United States. It is also one of the issues that are regularly addressed, the issue of biofuels. Views differ, of course, and cover a broad spectrum. The fact is that we need to take into account that fossil fuels are an alternative to biofuels. So now from this aspect we need to judge which is more problematic and which is not.

The European Union is aware of the potential influence of the production of biofuels on food prices. For this very reason the Council recently adopted measures to promote the use and production of second-generation biofuels, in other words those biofuels whose production does not compete with food production.

At the same time work is in progress to produce sustainable criteria for biofuel production, and when they are adopted they will apply both to biofuel production within the Union and also to imported biofuels.

President. – Question No 6 by Jim Higgins (H-0359/08)

Subject: Improvements in road safety

The current Council Presidency had as one of its primary goals the improvement of road safety. As the current Presidency is nearing its end, could the Council indicate the areas in which most progress has been made and areas where less progress has been made and why?

In the context of legislation on road safety the Slovenian Presidency continued the reading of the proposed directive of the Parliament and the Council on improving road infrastructure safety. It also organised a range of technical meetings with the European Parliament rapporteur, in the desire to reach an agreement with the European Parliament at first reading next month.

Among the efforts of the Slovenian Presidency for greater road safety I would also like to mention the work done in connection with the proposed regulation on the protection of pedestrians and other vulnerable road users. This proposal brings improvements to the front sections of cars, which manufacturers must accommodate so that in a potential collision between a vehicle and pedestrian the injuries to the pedestrian are minimised.

The Slovenian Presidency began a reading of this proposal in the working bodies of the Council and held successful meetings with the European Parliament rapporteur. We could place in the context of efforts for greater road safety the progress related to the adoption of the road transport package. I should point out that on 13 June 2008 the Transport Council reached a political consensus on this package.

Within the context of this package I would like especially to highlight the proposed regulation on common rules for the occupation of transport operator. It seems very important to us that this proposal sets out a list of the most serious road transport offences. In the event of such an offence being committed by a transport operator, this can lead to the loss of licence to perform the business activity. In this way special national registers, which will be introduced with this regulation, would ease the control of these transport operators and this would become more effective, something that would undoubtedly have a positive effect on road safety.

I should also mention the proposed regulation on rules for access to the market, which is also a part of this package. This introduces a reduction in the number of journeys with empty goods vehicles, a higher level of professional training for drivers, rationalisation of the market, raising the quality of services and in this way also an indirect influence in increasing road safety.

This month the Presidency also started reading the proposed directive on facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety. This is a proposal submitted by the Commission in April this year.

In view of the available time and in view of the number of proposals from the Commission in the area of road safety – the number of proposals currently being read by the Council – it is our view that considerable
progress has been achieved in the area of road safety. Of course a complete assessment of the results will only be possible after the period of our Presidency ends.

Jim Higgins (PPE-DE). – (GA) Mr President, I commend the Slovenian Presidency for the emphasis it is placing on road safety. It has heightened awareness among the authorities in the Member States on the need to take various steps in adopting a practical policy with a view to reducing road accidents, the amount of fatal accidents and also the number of people injured on our roads.

I welcome, for example, the Ferrari report adopted today in Parliament which offers greater protection to pedestrians and cyclists. I would like to ask the Council, can we do anything else – and take further steps – to improve road safety?

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President-in-Office, I would like to pick up on this question. This week, a number of reports of relevance to road safety have featured on our agenda: the Ferrari report has been mentioned, and tomorrow we have Mrs Gurmai's report as well as the Markov report tonight. From the Presidency's point of view, is the outcome of our work satisfactory, or would the Presidency have liked to see more being achieved?

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I would like ask the Minister if he is happy that, whereas there is sufficient and advanced testing for driving with alcohol, the same advanced testing is not there for driving with illegal drugs. Could he try to ensure that there is renewed interest in this particular issue, because it seems to be becoming a more common practice?

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) The question from Mr Higgins: What else could we do? The main thing that both the Council and Parliament can do is to speed up the processes that are already under way and to adopt the decisions that are already prepared, of course still within this term of the European Parliament. The first thing that will be on the agenda, hopefully in July, is the aforementioned directive on road infrastructure safety management. Yet there are even more measures that I have listed and that are already in process, and I would like to see the good cooperation between the European Parliament and the Council lead to rapid adoption.

The question from Mr Rack, I believe, requires more a political answer. We will not be satisfied while people are still dying on the roads in the European Union. And while this is the case, we will have to seek new measures, additional measures to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries, where the ideal figure is zero.

Drugs are of course a similar problem to alcohol. I think that they deserve equal treatment to alcohol. What is at issue is the ability to operate a vehicle, and I think that Member States should not make any distinctions between one type of drug or another, which in essence is what alcohol is, by dint of one being a legal drug.

President. – Question No 7 is inadmissible. Question No 8 by Jörg Leichtfried (H-0365/08)

Subject: New road charging system in Slovenia

Slovenia has introduced a new road charging system with effect from 1 July 2008. Under this system, road users wishing to make a single trip through Slovenia in a private car, for which they previously had to pay around EUR 7, must now purchase either a six-month vignette for EUR 35 (five times as much as the present charge) or a twelve-month vignette for EUR 55. This appears discriminatory and stands in clear contradiction to European principles.

Is the Council aware of these developments? What action does the Council intend to take in response, and how could this situation come about in the first place?

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) I must reiterate that I am here in this place as the representative of the Council and the Council has not addressed the question raised by Mr Leichtfried. However, as I have already said, I think that at the earlier sitting of the European Parliament, when I received a similar question. In view of the fact that I am rather well acquainted with the country in question, I can respond, but I would not wish to risk any accusation of exceeding the bounds of the competence in which I am here before you now.

So let us try, and permit me some additional clarifications. The new system of road tolls in Slovenia, which will enter into force on 1 July, that is, the purchase of vignettes, relates only to vehicles with the maximum permitted mass under three thousand five hundred kilograms. In other words this is a category of vehicle for which the valid Community legislation on road taxes does not provide any common rules, as is the case
with vehicles whose maximum permitted mass exceeds three thousand five hundred kilograms. So this system of road taxes being introduced by Slovenia does not fall within the area of application of the Community legislation I mentioned.

Perhaps an even more important point: the vignette method of collecting road tolls which is being introduced by Slovenia is temporary. It will be applied only for the transitional period up until the introduction of electronic or satellite road tolls, expected to be introduced in 2009, firstly for goods vehicles and then for private vehicles.

Please understand my response, Mr Leichtfried, as a gesture, a desire to offer you a clarification. My response does not, however, change the fact that I am here in another capacity, and not as a representative of Slovenia.

Jörg Leichtfried (PSE). – (DE) We obviously have different interpretations of the law. In my view, this system discriminates against EU citizens from outside Slovenia. I would ask the Minister whether there is any possibility of the European Commission initiating an infringement procedure against Slovenia. The first steps, I think, have already been taken. My question to you is this: as President-in-Office of the Council, would your advice to Slovenia be to introduce a ten-day vignette, perhaps, in order to restore peace and avert the possibility of an infringement procedure?

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Minister, last time, you indicated, on this issue, that we are talking about a transitional set of rules. Normally, they would apply for one, two or three months. What is happening here extends over a period of some years and is clear discrimination against non-Slovenians and therefore other EU citizens. Commissioner Tajani explicitly confirmed yesterday evening that there is already a letter from DG Transport which aims to clarify this issue of discrimination.

Would you not say that the time has come to adopt some swift measures so that tourists have the opportunity to drive through Slovenian at reasonable prices this summer? It is a country which we all enjoy visiting.

Janez Lenarčič, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SL) At present it has not been established that this case involves discrimination. If it does, then a new situation will arise and I do not wish to speculate on that. Currently it does not appear, however, that the accusations of discrimination are justified, since the system of vignettes is identical both for citizens of Slovenia and for everyone else. However, I would really like to be finished with this, and I would stress that I am here as a representative of the Council, and the Council has not deliberated over this. Please take this as a gesture of goodwill that I have nevertheless entered into this discussion and I am trying to provide you with clarifications in good faith.

President. – Questions which have not been answered for lack of time will be answered in writing (see Annex).

I wish to say something before I suspend the sitting. Minister Janez Lenarčič has appeared before us for the last time as President-in-Office of the Council. He will of course be present during the extraordinary part-session in Brussels, but will be accompanying the Prime Minister of his country and will not therefore be speaking as President-in-Office of the Council. I wish to thank Minister Janez Lenarčič and the Slovenian Presidency for their cooperation with the European Parliament, particularly during Question Time to the Council over which I presided.

I am also aware that, in July, Minister Janez Lenarčič will take up a senior position within an international human rights organisation based in Warsaw. I want to offer him my compliments and congratulations and wish him well. I believe that, in that capacity, he may have the opportunity to work once again with the European Parliament on occasions, and particularly in terms of monitoring elections given that said organisation is linked to the OSCE. I therefore wish Mr Lenarčič well for the future and once again thank him for his attendance here, for his readiness to respond and for the quality of his replies.

That concludes Question Time.

(The sitting was suspended at 7 p.m. and resumed at 9 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR MAURO

Vice-President

15. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes
16. Inland transport of dangerous goods (debate)

President. – The next item is the recommendation for second reading (A6-0227/2008), on behalf of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, on the Council common position with a view to the adoption of a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the inland transport of dangerous goods (06920/3/2008 – C6-0160/2008 – 2006/0278(COD)) (rapporteur: Boguslaw Liberadzki).

Boguslaw Liberadzki, rapporteur. – (PL) Mr President, I should like to take this opportunity to welcome Commissioner Tajani to the House in his new role. I voted in your favour, Commissioner, and I am sure I was right to do so.

The directive on inland transport of dangerous goods updates four Commission decisions and combines them in a single legal act. It includes in its scope the transport of dangerous goods by inland waterways, which has not been covered by EU legislation to date. The proposal also incorporates international rules for the transport of dangerous goods into Community law and extends their application to national transport. It is to be hoped that a high level of safety will be ensured as a result, whilst improving inter-modality in the transport of dangerous goods.

I should like to recall that at first reading Parliament adopted 42 amendments. Essentially, these amendments provided that Member States that have no railway system are exempt from the obligation to transpose and implement this directive. The amendments also introduced a transitional period of two years to prepare for effective implementation of these provisions. In addition, the principle was introduced whereby the Member States may lay down specific requirements concerning the national and international transport of dangerous goods within their territory to take account of the specific nature of road vehicles, carriages and inland waterway vessels. Member States may also prescribe certain routes or specific modes of transport and lay down special rules for the transport of dangerous goods on their territory in passenger trains.

The Council and the Commission accepted these amendments. The Council deemed it necessary to introduce two further amendments. Firstly, an additional paragraph is proposed for Article 1. This would allow Member States to regulate or prohibit strictly for reasons other than safety during transport the transport of dangerous goods within their territory. Secondly, the Council is proposing adding a new paragraph to Article 8, stipulating that the Commission shall provide financial support to the Member States to cover translation into their respective official languages of the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by road, the Regulations concerning International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail and the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways.

In my capacity as rapporteur, I support both of the Council's proposals and call for their adoption. Finally, I should like to say how delighted I was with the effective, efficient and accommodating approach of the Commission and the Council.

Antonio Tajani, Member of the Commission. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, before speaking about the directive for which Mr Liberadzki is the rapporteur, I should like to thank this House for having placed its trust in me today as the European Commissioner with the transport portfolio. I am expressing my gratitude to the few Members still present, but I, too, often missed evening meetings. Thank you for your confidence in me; thank you in particular to the members of the Committee on Transport for their presence.

I must say that I feel somewhat moved. I am speaking for the first time not so much from a different place in the Chamber – I have moved four seats along – but it is certainly a great honour for me to be here, and I think it is important for Parliament to have a Member – for that is still how I think of myself deep-down – sitting on the Commissioners' bench.

I apologise for this digression, Mr President, but I thought it only right before beginning my speech to thank Parliament once again for what it has given me over the years and for the trust it has placed in me, as confirmed this morning.

(FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately my contribution to this debate will have to be a brief one. At the first reading of this text a number of amendments were adopted by Parliament and supported by the Council in its common position. The present text, which allows the proposal to be adopted at second reading, only puts forward various technical additions. The Committee on Transport and Tourism supported these unanimously and the Commission is in absolute agreement with them. The points that are to be introduced at second reading will put the finishing touches to the proposal for the transport of dangerous goods. The text has therefore been made much clearer in its fine details, which is something I welcome.
I would also like to take this opportunity to express my particular thanks to Mr Liberadzki, the rapporteur, for the efficient manner in which he worked on this proposal. I also thank him for the confidence that he has placed in me today and I hope that I will be able to work with him and indeed with all the Members of this House from today until the end of the parliamentary term.

Renate Sommer, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking the rapporteur for his work and for his tireless willingness to discuss the matter at hand.

The proposed directive on the inland transport of dangerous goods integrates international rules for the transport of dangerous goods into Community law and extends their application to national transport. It updates the existing four Directives and four Commission Decisions on the transport of dangerous goods and merges them into one simplified piece of legislation. It is a welcome example of a European law which genuinely reduces red tape and embodies the principle of better law-making.

Regulation of the transport of dangerous goods is important for our transport system. The total amount of dangerous goods transported in the Union is about 110 billion tonne-km/year, and safe transportation of these goods is essential, on both traffic safety and environmental grounds. The provisions ensure a high level of safety in international and national transport through the application of harmonised rules, which will have a positive effect on the internal market in transport. At the same time, uniform rules make things easier for transport operators and thus improve intermodality. Multimodal transport processes are encouraged.

What is particularly welcome, from my perspective, is the expansion of the scope to include inland shipping. In future, uniform safety provisions will apply to all the inland waterways in the EU. This will improve working conditions on board and enhance transport safety. It will also offer benefits in terms of environmental protection and reduce costs. This is likely to improve the opportunities and market prospects for inland shipping, which in turn will ease the burden on our roads and, again, help to protect the environment.

The Council’s common position, which was adopted without amendments by the Committee on Transport and Tourism, contains two amendments to Parliament’s position at first reading. Firstly, the common position introduces a provision which allows Member States to regulate or prohibit strictly for reasons other than safety during transport the transport of dangerous goods within their territory. This provision is purely declaratory in nature and is included for the purpose of clarification. We had various discussions about it.

Secondly, the common position provides for financial support from the Commission to the Member States for the translation of the ADR (European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road), RID (Regulations concerning International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail) and ADN (European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways) and their amendments into their respective official languages. I must admit that I was initially sceptical about this amendment. The European Commission has assured me, however, that this approach is essential in order to ensure the quality of the translations and thus facilitate proper implementation of the provisions. It is also cheaper, incidentally.

In short, then, all the amendments are acceptable from our point of view, which means that we can now finally bring this important and generally non-contentious matter to a conclusion.

Nathalie Griesbeck, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, now it is my turn to extend greetings to you this evening. This is in some respects your baptism of fire and speaking as a French person I especially appreciate the fact that at Monday evening’s hearing and this evening too you spoke in French and fluently at that. This was a real pleasure. I would also like to thank my colleague Mr Liberadzki for the discussions that he led in the Committee on Transport and Tourism when examining this proposal for a directive on the transport of dangerous goods.

As has just been explained, Parliament already expressed its views on this proposal for a directive in September 2007 and I in turn welcome the fact that agreement has been reached with the Council and the Commission, which ultimately means that this evening’s discussion of the text is in many respects a mere formality. However, I would like to use this opportunity, because we are among friends as it were, to stress that in my view this text represents significant progress towards better control of the transport of dangerous goods within our borders and also that the problem of transporting goods, and especially dangerous ones, is of major concern to our fellow citizens and an important issue for sustainable development.

The volume of dangerous goods currently being transported within the European Union makes up some 10% of all goods in transit, which is a very large figure indeed. This represents 110 billion tonnes per kilometre
a year, of which 58% is carried by road, which is an enormous amount, 25% by rail and 17% by inland waterway.

This directive, which is aimed at updating the existing provisions, is all the more creditable in these difficult times because it also merges four Directives into one piece of legislation. This represents a clear step towards greater transparency and it is very important that the people of Europe as a whole find our decisions intelligible.

Finally, I too am pleased that inland shipping has also been included in the directive. Much greater attention needs to be given to moving goods by waterway, for this is an environmentally-friendly mode of transport that can also provide an answer to the constant demand for a rebalancing of Europe’s transport system. Combining the Directives into a single piece of legislation will also bring greater clarity and greater transparency to the rules that apply in the current situation in which we are hoping and praying for greater intermodality of transport. I welcome this progressive step, especially for those working in the transport sector, at a time when the work of the European Union is not always sufficiently well explained and, unfortunately, is sometimes misunderstood by our fellow citizens.

Eva Lichtenberger, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it is not exactly crowded in here. I would have thought this would have been an important enough subject to bring more people in. The second reading on the Directive on the inland transport of dangerous goods prompts me, yet again, to draw attention to a major problem, namely that any directive is only as good as its control.

We have a slight increase in the volume of dangerous goods being transported across all modes of transport. Unfortunately, we are also seeing an increase in carelessness, according to inspectors, notably in the declaration of goods. A false declaration of a dangerous good that is being transported can literally have deadly outcomes if an accident occurs. For example, if the fire service is unable to determine which extinguishing agent they need for the good being transported, this can have fatal consequences. In Innsbruck, which is almost my home town, a large-scale disaster was narrowly averted simply because the region’s senior chemist happened to be a part-time fireman. I urge you, then, to keep the issue of control and inspection in mind as well. This is a core issue; indeed, it is the most important issue, and I voice the same appeal to Member States as well.

I do see an improvement through the inclusion of inland shipping. An accident involving the transportation of chemicals by river can have extremely long-term and fatal consequences for the environment.

I think it is important to retain and reinforce provisions on the prescribing of certain routes for the transport of dangerous goods. When there are steep hills and inclines, perhaps combined with very heavy traffic at certain times of the year or at the start of the holidays, it is essential to guard against major hazards here. In my view, it would be right and proper to extend the escort requirement for particularly dangerous goods here, such as corrosive substances or explosives. We need to make further progress on this issue because other transport users could also be put at risk and major problems would arise in the event of an accident. Unfortunately, the inspections which are carried out often reveal, too, that the condition of the vehicles in use is not particularly good.

I would therefore like to conclude with an appeal to the House: inspections and controls are needed to safeguard the effectiveness of this directive.

Jaromír Kohlíček, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (CS) I would like to welcome the new Commissioner. Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, dangerous goods must be transported within the European Union, just like ordinary goods, whether we like it or not. Today, dangerous goods account for approximately 8% of all freight traffic and it is good that this report aims to merge the existing four Directives, in accordance with the applicable international agreements. The harmonisation of goods transport, in particular in regard to multi-modal transportation, is an absolutely vital and logical step that should have a positive effect on the EU’s internal market. The safety of the transport can best be achieved by merging the regulations. These regulations must clearly define the marking of the goods and classify the transported goods according to the degree of danger involved.

I can see the need for this technical directive and I agree with my fellow Member Mrs Lichtenberger that it is necessary to examine it very carefully in order to make sure that the content matches the description. The Council took over all the amendments adopted by Parliament at first reading. The common position introduces only two minor amendments. These involve giving financial support to the Member States for the translation of the directive into their respective official languages, and allowing the Member States to decide whether or not to implement the requirements of Annex III in specific cases. The directive helps to provide a clear
Robert Evans (PSE). – Mr President, I would like to thank first of all my friend and colleague Bogusław Liberadzki for his work on this important dossier. I would also like to congratulate our new Commissioner on his debut this evening. I will be honest with Mr Tajani: I did not vote for him earlier today. I did not vote against him, I did not abstain, I just did not participate in the vote. I should like Mr Tajani to understand it was nothing personal, it was more a protest against the system and against Italian procedures.

Nevertheless, I respect his appointment and I am sure in the months ahead his will be looking to do everything he can to convince me and others of his great merits and qualities and indeed competence in the role that he brings to this House.

In the last few days I think the Irish voters showed us that far from all Europeans are fully signed up or are clear about the role and benefits of the European Union, about European cooperation and why Europe-wide regulations are necessary in the first place.

However, I think all of these people, people who voted ‘no’ as well, will expect their national governments and indeed the European Union to look after them. Whilst this particular subject may not be top of the list of ones that come to their mind, in fact the inland transport of dangerous goods is a serious issue, a serious responsibility and one that it behoves all of us to look after.

Only now, with this directive, do we actually have Europe-wide regulations that cover the transport of dangerous goods as they move from one country to another across the continent.

Mr Liberadzki was quite right to point out that in many countries there were no regulations internally or nationally. So this report will put responsibility on national governments. But any legislation is only as good as its enforcement. So in his quest to gain my full confidence, I hope Mr Tajani, by his good offices, will be doing everything he can to encourage Member States to ensure that this legislation is properly monitored, enforced, and modified if necessary, and that strong action is taken against those who contravene this directive.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău, on behalf of the PSE group. – (RO) Honourable President, Mr. Commissioner, I would also like to congratulate you and wish you success in your activity and I would like to say that we are expecting a lot from you.

I would like to congratulate our colleague Mr Liberadzki for his report, which is part of the process of simplifying the legislation and actually gathers and updates the text of four directives into a single one. The previous European legislation did not cover the naval transport of hazardous goods, which was governed by rules established by various multilateral agreements to which Member States adhered.

Therefore, it is important that we will have Community laws with common rules for all Member States, for the transport of hazardous goods, for all modes of transport. The existence of these rules allows the transfer of hazardous goods from one mode of transport to another. In addition to the provisions of this directive, Member States can introduce into the national legislation specific requirements for vehicles, wagons and ships designed for inland waterways transport.

The amendments proposed by the Council introduce two new elements: the first one introduces and allows Member States to regulate or strictly prohibit, for other reasons than those related to safety, the inland waterways transport of hazardous goods on their territory. The second amendment imposes the responsibility of the Commission to financially support member States for the translation into their official languages of European agreements for the transport of hazardous goods in road, railway and naval systems.

Nevertheless, I consider that all Member States should also carry out information campaigns to inform the interested people about the provisions of the new directive. Compliance with these rules is essential. The responsible authorities have to make sure that the transport of hazardous goods is carried out only by complying with the common rules and restrictions established.

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, may I offer you my warm congratulations on your new post. We will undoubtedly have many opportunities to discuss the issue of transport with you in the future, and I very much look forward to that. I would also like to thank the rapporteur for ensuring that we have a good legal text. We must now make sure that this legal text is...
implemented as swiftly as possible in the Member States, and even more importantly – as has already been said today – we must ensure that the relevant national legislation and regulations are applied correctly at local level. Here, we need commitment and a meticulous approach from the relevant authorities. What we do not need is carelessness or any turning of a blind eye by those who are responsible for monitoring.

It is also important – as previous speakers have said – that the declaration of dangerous goods takes place in such a way that inspections and escorting can be undertaken as appropriate. This will improve safety on our roads and also on our inland waterways.

**Wiesław Stefan Kuc (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, almost a year ago I was travelling along a motorway when I saw a tanker lorry carrying liquid gas overturn. It was impossible to leave the motorway, and a long queue soon formed. Everyone held their breath fearing an explosion. Situations like this arise on the Union’s road networks every day. It is good that we are at last adopting legislation on the matter and that our road and rail networks will be safer as a result. The directive under consideration is a further measure designed to increase the safety of our citizens, reduce the number of accidents and establish a single set of legal provisions.

I should like to thank Mr Liberadzki for his work, which will benefit us all.

**Antonio Tajani, Member of the Commission.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that a good job has been done in approving a legislative text which will contribute to making the roads in the European Union safer for citizens.

The transport of dangerous goods can entail risks, as we are well aware. That is why it is right for the European Union to undertake to ensure the safety of all of its citizens. To repeat what I said during the sitting two evenings ago, one of my priorities is to protect citizens’ rights. Every initiative taken by the Commission will serve to create safeguards for citizens and offer practical responses to their concerns.

During this evening’s debate I have gained a strong sense of Parliament’s desire to contribute to the adoption of legislation enabling citizens to travel more safely on the roads. The Commission certainly promises to keep an eye on enforcement by the Member States, as it does for all other legislation. The Commission is the guardian of the Treaties, and as far as I am concerned I intend to perform my duty rigorously in this respect. Therefore, for the directive we are approving at the moment, as for others, I shall do my utmost to see that it is enforced and shall verify that all the EU Member States enforce it in the overriding interest of Europe’s citizens.

Thank you, Mr President, and I thank the rapporteur once again for his excellent work and for having been able, even at second reading, to help make the legislative text better and clearer.

**Bogusław Liberadzki, rapporteur.** – (PL) Mr President, I should like to thank the shadow rapporteurs, namely Mrs Sommer and Mrs Griesbeck, as well as Mr Evans and Mrs Țicău for their statements, cooperation and support.

I will now offer two responses to Mrs Lichtenberger’s comments on monitoring the implementation of the provisions. The two-year transitional period has been provided to allow Member States to prepare to implement the new measures effectively. I should like to emphasise that to date only eight of the 27 Member States have simultaneously accepted all three international acts, namely the ADR, RID and ADN. It is therefore appropriate to aim at full implementation of these regulations, regarding both international transport and their transposition into national transport. I am confident that we are progressing well in that regard.

Commissioner, I should like to thank you once again for your understanding and would ask you to convey my thanks to your team. It was a pleasure to work with the Commission and with the Council.

**President.** – The debate is closed.

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

**Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Magor Imre Csibi (ALDE), in writing.** – This future directive is a big step forward towards protecting our safety and our environment, as it introduces European rules for transport of dangerous goods not only by road and rail but also by inland waterways.
Accidents in inland waterways can have an extensive impact and serious consequences such as water poisoning, extinction of wildlife and human health problems. All the more reason to try to reduce the risks by creating common rules for this mode of transport as well.

Furthermore, I strongly support the inclusion of a provision that Member States can regulate or prohibit transport of dangerous goods for reasons other than safety. If we take the case of cyanide, an extremely toxic material, 14% of the cyanide releases into the environment were caused by transport accidents. These figures highlight the vulnerability of cyanide transport and underlines the need for stronger environmental and safety standards. I therefore encourage Member States to take the strictest possible measures to regulate transportation of cyanide and, where necessary, to prohibit bulk transportation of cyanide on their territory. Sometimes minimising the transport of hazardous goods is just the safest way to minimise the risks.

17. Road infrastructure safety (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0050/2008) by Helmuth Markov, on behalf of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on road infrastructure safety management (COM(2006)0569 - C6-0331/2006 - 2006/0182(COD)).

Antonio Tajani, Member of the Commission. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we are discussing another topic related to the safety of our citizens on Europe's roads.

I believe that we must emphasise this issue. This afternoon I had a meeting with the officials in my Directorate-General with a view to enhancing and redoubling the Commission’s efforts in the field of road safety.

The figures for the past few months are not reassuring, unfortunately, and could jeopardise the aim we have set ourselves of halving the number of victims on the roads. That is why we must press on with our work. I am delighted today that we are able to conclude another directive relating to road safety and hence the safety of all of Europe's citizens.

In the 2001 White Paper on European transport policy, spearheaded by Mrs Loyola de Palacio, the Commission put forward the ambitious goal of halving the number of lives on the roads by 2010. Parliament welcomed this initiative and has always supported it.

As I was saying, after a series of extremely positive figures in recent years, the past year’s results have unfortunately not been as positive as we would have liked. Moreover, we all realise of course that the overwhelming majority of accidents are primarily caused by human error or carelessness.

Nevertheless, the state of the road network, combined with growing volumes of traffic, is often a key factor in causing accidents. The state of the road infrastructure has in fact been shown to play a determining role in one in every three accidents. For this reason, over and above initiatives geared to improving the conduct of road users and the level of vehicle safety, infrastructure ought to be the third pillar in any road safety programme based on the principle of an integrated approach.

The proposal for a directive on road infrastructure safety management offers a good combination of preventive and corrective measures. The procedures introduced by the directive seek to ensure that safety is built into the planning, design and construction phases, but also into the management and operation of the road infrastructure. The directive is not of course meant to teach civil engineers how to build roads and certainly does not constitute an incentive to construct new roads. Rather, it is a mechanism intended to extend to all Member States procedures that are already in use, sometimes in different ways. The added value of action at European level lies in extending and spreading best practice to Member States which are not yet applying it.

Mr Markov and his colleagues in the Committee on Transport have worked hard on the proposal, helping to improve its outcome. The draft text has undergone some amendments during its passage through the institutions. Many administrative obligations and requirements to forward information have been removed, in order to ease the burden of red tape. The annexes, which list the criteria to be taken into consideration for the procedures introduced by the directive, have been made non-binding. Some of the definitions have been revised so as to bring them into line with practices already existing in certain Member States. Nonetheless, the principal elements of the initial proposal have remained unchanged, so the current text is acceptable to the Commission.
Once it has been adopted, the directive will be the first European Union legislation geared to the road infrastructure as a whole; it will be an especially important and powerful tool. Allow me to recall once again that, if this directive is applied to the trans-European network, it will save more than 600 lives and prevent around 7 000 accidents every year.

Obviously, the directive will also have an important social and economic impact. It will begin a long-term process. Our aim is to change the cultural attitude to safety at the road design, construction and maintenance stages. To this extent, it is a forward-looking directive which could remain valid for the next 50 years.

Thank you again, Mr Markov, for the work you have done, and thank you again for your attention, ladies and gentlemen.

President. − Thank you, Commissioner. The House realises of course that the Commission wishes to halve the number of deaths, not lives.

Helmuth Markov, rapporteur. − (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, after more than one and a half years of negotiations, all the parliamentary groups, the Council and the Commission have finally agreed on a compromise for a directive on road infrastructure safety management in the EU.

The most important aspect of this agreement is that all participants recognise that road infrastructure safety is essential to improve safety on Europe's roads. Besides the fundamental goal of a modal shift from road to rail, drivers' behaviour and vehicle safety, as well as considerate driving and compliance with traffic rules, are of course all key factors.

In these areas, various European legislation exists, albeit patchy. There are currently no common rules on infrastructure planning and maintenance, for example. This is difficult to understand, for when do roads ever stop at national borders? Surely all drivers using these roads should be secure in the knowledge that they are using a good road infrastructure?

Despite these arguments, the Committee on Transport and Tourism rejected the Commission's original proposal in its entirety by a very narrow majority of just one vote, drawing attention to the Member States' rights of subsidiarity. Both in the Council and in the Parliament, there are differing views on just how detailed and binding a directive should be. For that reason, it was essential to find compromises which did not go as far as the original Commission proposal and, indeed, my own initial draft report.

I personally would have preferred the adoption of uniform, binding although, of course, not exclusive criteria governing how roads in the EU – and not only the TENs – are planned, built, checked for their compatibility with traffic regulations and regularly inspected in terms of road safety, and if necessary improved. In my view, that would also be useful in terms of risk assessment, the key phrase here being the collection of accident data.

Unfortunately, the present proposal is merely an initial step in the right direction, but at least that is something. The Member States will, I hope, gain positive experience with these recommendations and perhaps opt for a more harmonised approach at a later date. In the recitals in particular, it is apparent that this will be a test phase which by no means precludes the option of closer cooperation in future.

As to the main content of the report, firstly, attention will be paid to safety during all stages of road design, construction and maintenance.

Secondly, road sections with the highest accident density will be subject to particularly intensive checks and signed appropriately for drivers. A further aim is to introduce similar signage at road works, for example, so that drivers spot these hazards in plenty of time during the day and at night.

Thirdly, independent staff with appropriate and regular training must play a key role in planning and inspections. While detailed harmonisation of training in the various Member States is not mandatory, Member States should work towards mutually compatible training curricula for road safety auditors.

Fourthly, those Member States which already possess well-functioning road infrastructure safety management systems should be permitted to continue using their existing methods, provided that the requirements of the directive are fulfilled.

Fifthly, the directive offers many useful examples of methods and criteria which can be applied in safety inspections and risk/accident analyses. It emphasises, again, the need for adequate safe parking areas.
Sixthly, and finally, it points out that new technologies should be developed and applied in order to achieve ongoing improvements in road safety.

The Commission is in a position to promote the exchange of best practice in relation to safety management on roads which are not TENs but which were built with European funding. The compromise ensures that Parliament will be adequately involved in the amendment and further development of the directive’s provisions. I feel sure that the compromise achieved, which will be voted on as Block 1, will be supported by the House.

I would like to thank sincerely the shadow rapporteurs as well as the Commission and Council representatives for their intensive cooperation, even if it did not always make life easy for me. I hope that the directive will bring about the improvements that we need.

**Renate Sommer, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.** – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, I would also finally like to congratulate you on your new post. Congratulations, and I wish you all the best, but I would also like to express the hope that in future, we are not going to have any more nonsensical drafts from the Commission.

A year ago, the Committee on Transport rejected the proposal from the Commission on road infrastructure safety management as it was too bureaucratic and, in our view, failed to generate any added value.

I still believe that the directive is superfluous and is unlikely to add any value. The road infrastructure varies very widely in the Member States and I think we should only support those Member States that need to catch up, but to do that, we do not need a directive which applies to everyone. Instead of a directive, it would be better to adopt guidelines based on existing good practice in the Member States.

That being the case, I would prefer it if we could completely reject the directive, but we will not secure a political majority in favour of that option in the House, and the Council is also insisting on rules that are devoid of content, which is why we have now agreed a compromise on the basis of the report by the Committee on Transport. This compromise essentially consists of minor changes, such as improvements to language or amendments to the annexes, which give more details about safety management procedures.

Road safety is of course a very important issue for us, but at EU level, a great deal has already been done to improve road safety, for example as regards driving and rest times, additional mirrors in lorries, tunnel safety, etc. These are areas where it is useful to have regulations at EU level. More could be done here, but only if it adds value to road safety. Due to the subsidiarity principle, however, this is not the case for road infrastructure safety, but because the Commission’s proposal has been watered down, I am able to go along with it, despite my objections.

The directive only requires Member States to introduce four procedures on road infrastructure safety management, and only concerns roads that are part of the TENs. Because the annexes are not binding, Member States can arrange the requisite procedures for themselves. This means that Member States have enough leeway to retain their existing successful systems. There are no new obligations for those who already have a good management system.

We have also deleted the extensive reporting requirements the Commission was requesting, and we have prevented the scope from being extended to motorways, which was what the rapporteur wanted. Anything else would have infringed the subsidiarity principle.

Ultimately, what we have now are guidelines in the guise of a directive. This is the first time that I have ever experienced such a thing. It is a result that my group can endorse, as we only ever wanted guidelines from the outset.

May I ask that as regards Amendment 70 we take the English version as a basis, as the German version, at least, contains mistakes and I think the other language versions may need to be checked as well.

**Bogusław Liberadzki, on behalf of the PSE Group.** – (PL) Mr President, I should like to begin by saying how delighted I am that the Commissioner has upheld the stance adopted by his predecessor. Mr Markov devoted a lot of time to this directive, but along with all of us he was aware, as Mrs Sommer said, that this directive was under serious threat. It was not clear whether it was to be or not to be. My political group and I were numbered amongst those who wanted this directive and we still do. One reason why we are anxious to have it is that we wish to use it as an efficient instrument to bring about action, notably in the countries that joined the Union in the last two enlargements. We have in mind the method, technology, tempo and timetable for modernising their infrastructure to improve safety. There are very important reasons for this. If the number of road accidents in Poland is similar to that in Germany, it means that the situation in Poland is bad. The same applies to the other new countries. That is why we shall support the compromises and amendments
tabled. I call for strong support. This is not simply a face-saving compromise in relation to the version submitted. It is, I believe, an important compromise that should be acceptable to all concerned.

I should like to thank Mr Markov once again for his cooperation. Contrary to what you stated, Sir, you were not a difficult colleague. I am glad we are in a position to put in place an important instrument that will improve the safety of road traffic.

Paweł Bartłomiej Piskorski, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (PL) Mr President, I too would like to offer the Commissioner a warm welcome, and trust we shall cooperate and work well together.

We are today working on the directive on safety of road transport. This is certainly in keeping with the theme ascribed to the current sitting of Parliament in Strasbourg. Yesterday we worked on the subject of safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Earlier today we discussed the transport of dangerous goods, and now we are discussing the safety of roads. Tomorrow we are due to discuss the proposal for intelligent cars.

All this is good news for the citizens of the European Union, because it shows that the European Parliament is working on specific issues that can improve their safety when travelling by road. This good news does of course give rise to a whole series of questions. Firstly, we need to realise that this is a sequence of events, and that no single one of these directives or other legal acts will resolve the problem on its own. We have to understand that it is our wish to improve the system, so that the number of accidents decreases year on year, and the consequences of those accidents become less and less serious. Implementation of these measures is very important, however. This is especially true for the new countries, whose road infrastructure has been seriously neglected. This directive will be very relevant to them. It should be made quite clear that this is not a case of European law over-regulating. It is a directive that can prove useful in that regard, setting the standard governments will have to implement.

I should like to add to what Mr Markov, our rapporteur, has said. This is a sound and positive document. As I stated earlier, it is part of the ongoing work of the European Parliament aimed at improving road safety for our citizens. I am grateful for it and trust that the House will pursue its work on this subject in the future.

Eva Lichtenberger, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, in your comments on the directive, you mentioned the fact that the statistics have shown a deterioration of the situation as far as fatalities in accidents are concerned, specifically over the past year, whereas previously there had been a decrease in the number of deaths. This probably has very little to do with the infrastructure itself, for it is unlikely that within just one year the state of Europe's roads has deteriorated so rapidly that suddenly many more people are dying in traffic accidents.

You will gather from my introductory remarks that I am somewhat sceptical about this directive. I too would have thought that guidelines would have been quite adequate. I am still not entirely clear about the added value generated by this directive, and I will be looking very carefully at the implementation process to see precisely how this is being achieved.

I always have problems with the fact that, as I see it, there is an imbalance in relation to road safety. On the one hand, in terms of technical measures, we move very quickly to prescribe remedies, even if it is simply a matter of making things more expensive and the safety benefits are not entirely clear. We are generous, too, when it comes to infrastructure and adopt very comprehensive prescriptive measures here. However, when it comes to human beings, who are still a key factor in the context of accidents, there is an extreme reluctance in this House to even talk about the issue.

I still believe that if a driver cannot adjust to weather conditions, it will be very difficult for him, for the weather is something that we cannot yet control at EU level and the weather always has a major impact on accidents. I am waiting to see what happens during implementation, and will be following this very closely.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz, on behalf of the UEN Group. – (PL) Mr President, road accidents are the main cause of death and disability in countries with a developed transport system. The directive on improving the safety of road infrastructure on the trans-European network is a document that will reduce the number of accidents. It is a necessary provision and it deals with the challenges of road safety from design to use in a comprehensive manner. The amendments tabled have sound foundations. I proposed deleting the amendment to Article 5(1) that increased the time period for controls on dangerous sections of the road network from one to three years. This increase will be unnecessary once the directive is implemented. It is a comprehensive directive and pursuant to the provisions for better supervision, the safety of existing, constructed, upgraded and planned roads should halve the number of fatal accidents by 2010.
Member States can draw on the provisions of the directive when organising supervision of national and regional roads with a view to reducing the number of accidents on the European Union's roads. Some 40 000 people lose their lives in road accidents every year, and accidents of this type are the main cause of death for people under 45 years of age. It is also important to take action to ensure that vehicles are in a better state and of better quality. Action is needed as well to improve infrastructure and training, and to disseminate information on safe driving.

I should like to congratulate Mr Markov, the rapporteur, on a good report and on contributing to the drafting of the directive. We support this directive.

Jaromír Kohlíček, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (CS) One of the important goals set by the European Union in relation to road traffic in 2001 was reducing European road accident fatalities by 50% by 2010, i.e. from 50 000 to 25 000 annually. The results so far are not very satisfactory. The death toll for 2005 was 41 500 people. Consequently, we need new measures. Road safety is determined not just by vehicle safety and the quality of driver training, but also by the state of the infrastructure, meaning the safety of road construction and road markings. Most existing measures concentrate on vehicle safety, while some attempt to influence driver training and eliminate those that may be dangerous to other road users, for example through the points system.

Not much has been done so far in relation to the method of improving road infrastructure at European Union level. Consequently, the so-called best practice must be expanded as quickly as possible. Since the roads included in the TEN-T network are considered to be the most important, the report looks at this issue as well. I think that targeted investment in the maintenance of infrastructure and road markings, including the application of information technology, are needed in the long run, and not just on main roads and in the new countries. Apart from the passive and active safety elements in new cars and the eCall system, this is an aspect that could have the biggest impact on road safety in the future. The GUE/NGL Group strongly recommends voting in favour of the report.

Michael Henry Nattrass, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group. – Mr President, the Commission was defeated by the UK before when trying to impose harmonised measurements – caught like graffiti vandals altering UK road signs. But they do not listen, and Mr Markov is going to put road safety standards under the control of an unelected Commissioner.

Amendment 5 is good: 'Several Member States already possess well functioning road safety management systems. These countries should be permitted to continue using their existing methods'. Will some countries be more harmonised than others? Which countries? Please name names.

UK roads have high safety standards – for instance, too many speed cameras. Why not harmonise those? Please take away as many as you like. Amendment 53 requires harmonisation of sign visibility and readability, and 49 requires harmonised road signs and markings. Is this readability designed to confuse UK motorists in 35 EU languages? What is it? Is the rapporteur proposing huge road signs with massive texts so motorists can pick out their language at a distance? Or maybe parking bays so motorists can get out and read it all? What next? UK distances are in miles, with stopping distances in yards. The EU is about harmonisation, not people, so the unelected Commissioner will take away UK imperial distances and traditions via the back door without asking the people.

The title of this report should be 'EU cannot read the signs'. Well, the writing is on the wall. Keep your distance, listen to the people, not to politicians. If you want to mess with the imperial measure, let us have a UK and Irish referendum on it, or do you want just more road rage? The UK would be better off out.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, before I contribute to the debate, I should like to congratulate the Commissioner on his appointment.

A degree of progress has been made in the area of road safety by taking appropriate action regarding vehicles and drivers. There is still much to be done, however, as the statistics are alarming. Some 43 000 people die every year on the European Union’s roads. At global level, the number of fatalities in road accidents is even more horrifying, as it amounts to 1.2 million individuals. Almost one third of deaths amongst young people are due to accidents.

The initiative aimed at improving the safety of road infrastructure is very important. This is because the physical condition of the roads is a major contributory factor to the number of accidents that occur on them
every day. Much of the existing road network was created decades ago. It no longer meets current safety standards due to its physical condition and state of repair, and also because of present-day traffic levels.

I share the rapporteur’s view that this directive should apply not just to trans-European road networks: its scope should be much broader. According to the statistics, only 7% of fatal accidents happen on motorways. Two-thirds of those who lose their lives in road accidents are victims of accidents on single carriageway roads outside built up areas and in the countryside. Safety issues must be taken into account at the planning and design stage, including the planning of road infrastructure, as well as when the roads come into use.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) Honourable President, Mr. Commissioner, dear colleagues, every year, in the European Union, approximately 43,000 people die and another approximately 1.7 people are injured in road accidents. In addition to designing and building safer vehicles, Member States should also invest in the safety of road infrastructure.

The road safety impact assessment should prove, at a strategic level, the implications of various alternatives for planning an infrastructure project on road safety and this should be decisive in choosing the route.

The TRAN Committee supported the amendment by which Member States can implement the provisions of this directive, as a set of good practices, for the national road infrastructure as well, not included into the TEN-T network, built by entirely or partially using Community funds.

In order to encourage bicycle riding, especially in urban areas, Member States should include special routes for cyclists into any variant of building the road transport infrastructure, which would avoid as much as possible crossing with the main drive routes.

I consider it extremely necessary that Member States ensure the provision of adequate road signals in order to warn traffic participants about the segments of road infrastructure that are under repair and may endanger the safety of traffic participants.

I also consider that, in case the implementation of the provisions under this directive generates new obligations for the achievement of a road infrastructure project, the Commission and the Member States should ensure the adequate increase of allocated funds.

I end by emphasizing the need to build safer parking areas and I hope Mr. Commissioner will support the amendment I submitted for this purpose to the 2009 Union budget. I congratulate the Rapporteur.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank our rapporteur very much for the discussions that he led for two years in the Committee on Transport and Tourism in the preparation of this text that is aimed at improving safety on Europe’s road network.

This important and constantly recurring topic is of major concern to this House, which is often called on to give its opinion on a whole range of technical issues relating to vehicle safety standards, and once again, this very evening, we can point out that we have responded in a very concrete way for the benefit of the people of Europe. Safety issues of this kind concern them and can affect them in their everyday lives and, indeed, if this legislative proposal seeks to lower the risk of accidents and reduce the number of dead and injured on our roads by helping to ensure that safety is integrated in all phases of planning, design and operation of road infrastructures in the trans-European network, then it warrants our attention.

I, for my part, will support this initiative because, without imposing excessively strict procedures that would not take account of the economic and structural reality of each Member State, this proposal for a directive will provide clarity by arranging for an impact assessment prior to each new construction project, a road safety audit that will allow existing facilities to be developed and a risk management procedure that will provide a specific response to targeted risks. Although not as optimistic as Commissioner Tajani, I hope that the Commission’s assessment of the impact of all these measures proves to be a realistic one.

Indeed, I think it will be a very good thing if by introducing these measures we are able, as is estimated, to prevent nearly 7,000 road injuries and some 600 fatalities on Europe’s roads each year.

Wieslaw Stefan Kuc (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I am glad that we are working on a directive concerning management of the safety of road infrastructure. The current situation is that certain Member States such as Germany, Denmark, France, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, Spain and the United Kingdom have a safe road network, though this does not mean that it could not be improved further. In other countries such as
the Czech Republic, Italy and Portugal, the network is mediocre, and in still others, such as Poland, Romania
and Bulgaria, it is simply bad.

The aim is to provide maximum security for Union citizens in all Member States. It is therefore surprising
that pursuant to the principle of subsidiarity, and essentially not infringing it, we are endeavouring not to
implement compulsory provisions. Many issues are being left to the discretion of Member States, for example
broadening the scope to include national roads that are not part of the trans-European road network.

That being the case, the question arises as to how we intend to improve the condition of other roads, in
Poland for instance. How will we be able to insist that no ditches several metres deep are dug, and that safety
lanes are created on motorways and national roads alike? How will we be able to insist that paint that is
visible in rainy conditions is used on road surfaces, and that unnecessary signs and markings are done away
with? It will not be possible to achieve all this unless it becomes compulsory to implement the provisions
in the proposal for a directive we are currently discussing. I therefore suggest that representatives of the
Committee on Transport and Tourism visit Poland. That would enable them to take the right decision and
convince all Members to support it.

I was more favourably inclined towards Mr Markov’s earlier report, but I trust he will not succumb to pressure
and will stand by his views. I am in favour of making Annexes I, II, and III binding. Finally, I wish to
congratulate the rapporteur.

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, road safety is an important subject in Europe. There is still
a lot to be done to ensure that we achieve the high level of safety for road users, and for the environment
along our transport routes, that we all would like. To this end, we also need rules and regulations. However,
paper, as we know, is patient, and too much paper can be harmful.

Apart from introducing a great deal of new red tape, the first draft presented had precisely that flaw: it was
heavy on rhetoric and light on substance, which is why we referred it back to committee at first reading. The
second time round, things look rather different and – being cautiously optimistic – they look a little better.
Mrs Sommer has already talked about the basic content of the current text. What we would like is something
which is more of a guideline and is not binding in nature. We want to have an exchange of good practice,
but we do not to be prescriptive.

Above all, we do not want the annexes to be binding on the Member States. We are quite deliberately limiting
ourselves to the TENs. Many of our fellow Members have said that a great deal happens, and can happen, in
the other road networks too, and in response to that, I would point out that there is nothing to stop Member
States taking action here. On the contrary, we would all be delighted if the Member States were to do their
job and not simply sit back and wait, in every case, for Europe to take action.

From that point of view, I think that if we have reduced red tape, we have made a constructive contribution
to this subject, and can continue to do so. What is more, as a consensus was reached with the Council in the
informal trialogue, we can conclude this matter at first reading. All that remains is implementation, and that
is a task for the Member States.

Inés Ayala Sender (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by welcoming Mr Tajani in his new role
as Transport Commissioner. I hope that we will be able to cooperate successfully with him and, above all,
make improvements in the area of road safety, as he himself hopes.

Secondly, I would like to sincerely congratulate Mr Markov and thank him for his tenacity and patience in
pursuing and achieving this agreement. There is no doubt that it is still inadequate, but it is certainly satisfactory
given that there was the risk of it being permanently blocked. In that respect, Mr Markov, I believe that we
must be moderately content, but content all the same.

As you rightly said, it is a small step, but it is a first step, and when it comes to road safety we are used to
being patient and achieving small victories little by little on behalf of all the victims of traffic accidents and
their families.

Since the outset we have believed that it was necessary to have this text, which seeks to put an end to the
vicious circle of the fight against road accidents: after the rules on speed limits and blood alcohol level, it
was time to talk about the need to change drivers’ attitudes and protection in vehicles; it is now time to
highlight the black spots on the European road network.
I am therefore pleased that we have included in this procedure the aspect of sufficient safe parking areas, which we called for in other texts and which I believe is of considerable importance in this text.

I am also pleased that we have succeeded in ensuring that the text makes specific reference to central reservations and crash barriers, which prevent injury and death among vulnerable users, such as motorists, since the rise in their number today actually generates new accidents.

Finally, I welcome, too, the fact that particular importance has been placed on all vulnerable users, and the special emphasis on level crossings, as these will have to be taken into account in the audits.

In conclusion, I want to say that there is a future-oriented dimension to the introduction of the intelligent and interactive road signs that are to be developed and that will doubtless have a significant impact on road safety in the future. I also welcome the fact that emphasis has been placed on auditor training. In my opinion, this is an important professional field for the future.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Mr President, I wish to congratulate Mr Markov not just for the quality of his report but also for his perseverance in concluding it, in spite of the obstacles put in his way, mainly by some members of the Transport Committee – perhaps inadvertently.

It is, indeed, regrettable that, when dealing with a report whose sole aim is to save thousands of EU citizens’ lives, certain colleagues, using perhaps suspiciously and British-imperially, nationally motivated legalistic excuses, have tried to stop this proposal by the Commission from being advanced on apparent subsidiarity grounds. Perhaps some of us ought to consider more carefully the view that what Europe needs today is more unity and cohesion and less subsidiarity. Nevertheless, the delay caused is not without some benefit also, for it has given a chance to the rapporteur to better his report by incorporating, amongst other things, many amendments tabled to the first report draft.

This is much welcomed. On the substance of the report, my main point is that I agree with the rapporteur that Annexes I, II and III should be binding. If these were not to be so, then the value of this proposal would surely diminish.

I would like to conclude by taking the opportunity of reminding the House and the Commissioner of two important issues on road safety. Firstly, an effective high-friction coefficient road surface can reduce the stopping distance of a vehicle by as much as 50%. This can make an enormous difference in reducing car accidents on our roads.

My second point is not directly related to this report but is worth making again and again at every possible opportunity. It is this: one third of all fatal car accidents are alcohol-related. Many are attributed to alcohol levels in drivers’ blood which are below the existing legal limits. Citizens and ourselves should not be fooled. There is no safe alcohol level in drivers. Any alcohol intake impairs driving capability. If we want to reduce substantially the number of people killed on our roads then we ought to consider implementing a policy of zero alcohol level in drivers.

Dieter-Lebrecht Koch (PPE-DE). – (DE) Commissioner Tajani, I would like to congratulate you and wish you every success with your decision-making. Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, what distinguishes a racing driver from an ordinary car, lorry or bus driver, or indeed a cyclist? The racing driver walks the course before driving it, in order to gain an impression of its quality. Obviously, that is not something that we can do with our extensive trans-European networks. Regardless of where we are in the European Union, we must be able to rely on a minimum level of quality in our road infrastructure.

Road infrastructure management is therefore an important topic for Europe. Improving road safety – as this House has repeatedly said – has a horizontal dimension. It must be based on an integrated approach, dovetailing the implementation of existing and new legislation and the dissemination of good practice. Drivers, vehicles and infrastructure all influence road safety. We are not starting from scratch. Some countries already have methodologies and strategies for road infrastructure safety management and they must be able to retain these. In this context, the maintenance and expansion of road infrastructures are future-oriented topics in precisely the same way as research, education and employment.

I would like to focus on one point of detail, however. In my view, it is extremely important to improve parking facilities for heavy goods vehicles on a Europe-wide basis; that is a key element of safety management. Whereas many other workers are able to have breakfast with their families and finish work at 5 p.m., lorry drivers are out on the road day and night for weeks at a time, with poor medical care, patiently accepting being away from home, to say nothing of having to contend with the widely varying personal care facilities
across the TENs. Indeed, unlike most other people, lorry drivers have to pay heavy charges for these facilities. They also have to pay through the nose if they cannot find proper parking areas where they can stop and comply with the rest times that are prescribed by European law. That is another reason why we need this directive.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE). – (PT) This debate is about road safety. However, this proposal for a directive has already suffered several accidents along the way. To start with, the Committee on Transport and Tourism rejected the Commission proposal, considering it superfluous and in contradiction with the subsidiarity principle.

After the Council agreed on a general orientation on the Commission proposal, aimed at doing away with the binding nature of the annexes to the directive and restricting its application to trans-European road networks, it was finally possible – thanks to the commitment of the rapporteur, whom I must congratulate – to adopt a report in the Committee on Transport.

The report not only makes the text less bureaucratic but also takes account of the different levels of road safety management in the various countries. The report therefore favours the idea of exchanging good practices, constantly seeking to better coordinate actions at both EU level and among the Member States.

It is therefore with satisfaction that we find ourselves once again debating this issue, now based on a text which offers renewed added value, which reflects the capacity to coordinate actions within the Union and which offers us more appropriate solutions given that real life, as we well know, is pretty diverse. It gives a clear signal to our citizens that, despite a few accidents along the way, we have not ground to a halt.

In this context, a definition is proposed for the orientations and best practices at all stages of road management, from road safety impact assessments to audits, network safety management and inspections.

It should be underlined that the directive, as amended, will not impose the adoption of any technical rules or procedures. Instead it encourages the Member States, through guidelines, to make best use of the methodologies defined, even inviting them to apply these to national roads not included in the trans-European road networks.

I am finishing up now, Mr President. In 2001 the European Union set the ambitious target of halving by 2010 the number of deaths on European roads. Our expectation is that this directive, together with many other initiatives already discussed and adopted in this House, may also help to save many lives of European road users.

Antonio Tajani, Member of the Commission. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to respond to the comments made by a large number of Members during the course of this debate. The attendance of so many Members, despite the late hour, reflects the extraordinary importance of the topic and the fact that everyone regards it as a priority.

First of all, I wish to thank Mr Markov for his work. It cannot have been easy, but a good politician must be able to use the skill of mediation. It seems to me that Mr Markov has used it, achieving a result that can certainly be endorsed by the Commission.

Concerning the Commission’s proposals referred to by Mrs Sommer, I believe that at the hearing, during my policy statement the other evening, I emphasised the importance of the Commission’s, but also Parliament’s, commitment to the sensitive subject of road safety. I wish to make it a priority, even though it is not entirely within the Commission’s competence, as I believe that our consciences as fathers compel us to engage in a major initiative to drastically reduce the number of deaths on the roads.

That is why I wish to turn the event planned by the Commission for 10 July in Brussels as a meeting with young people not into a formal affair but into a special occasion, if possible with a high media profile, by inviting members of the public to describe the risks they run on the roads each day, and in particular the risks run by our young people.

I should also like to respond to what Mr Matsakis said: I share his view about alcohol. Alcohol and drugs are two elements that endanger the lives of too many young people on roads all over Europe. That is why I invite you to attend the event for young people on 10 July. We must inform them in no uncertain terms of the risks they run, especially when leaving discotheques in the evening and nightclubs at the weekend.
Thereafter, European Road Safety Day will be marked in cities on 13 October. The Commission is making preparations in Paris, but also in other European cities. Let us see to it, with the participation of Members of this House, that these are not just passing phenomena but days that convey positive messages to young people. If we are able to save even one human life, that good deed will stay with us for the rest of our lives. That is why we must make a commitment and why I become so heated about this issue, which, I repeat, I consider to be a priority in the transport sector and a crucial aspect of my duties.

(FR) The translation is perhaps easier when I speak in French. I would like to thank Mrs Griesbeck for saying that she was very pleased that I spoke in French, but as I first went to Paris when I was six months old I was speaking French before I could speak Italian. However, I shall now continue in Italian.

(IT) Mrs Lichtenberger said that human error is undoubtedly to blame. I did say in my speech that human error is certainly the main factor, but just think how many poorly constructed roads cause accidents: we only need think of aquaplaning. A badly made road is so often all it takes to cause the death of a person who may have been travelling at a normal speed merely because some of the structural elements are faulty. I agree with Mr Matsakis and welcome his technical advice regarding stopping distances and the use of special materials for road surfaces. We must send out signals, positive messages. I do not think one should speak of interference by the European Union whenever a positive message is conveyed.

I find it regrettable that Mr Nattrass spoke and then left the Chamber, because when one asks questions it is a good idea to listen to the answers, even from a Commissioner who has been through many elections and has been elected to the European Parliament several times; and I can assure you, ladies and gentlemen, that it is much more difficult to be elected to the European Parliament under the Italian system than it is in the United Kingdom. However, I did not wish to engage in polemics; that was just a little quip, and let us hope that Mr Nattrass is listening in his office. Nonetheless, perhaps he has not been sufficiently attentive in his reading of the legislative text under discussion this evening. The legislative text we are discussing this evening makes no demands on the United Kingdom nor on Germany, because the procedures contained in the directive are specifically inspired by the UK and German systems. I therefore believe that Mr Nattrass will be able to alter his stance if he rereads the text carefully.

With regard to the request made by Mrs Ticău, Mr Kuc and Mrs Ayala Sender for safe car parks, I fully agree – I alluded to this during the speech I made when seeking the confidence of the Committee on Transport – and the Valenciennes initiative is a first step. I plan to go further, not least because the results have clearly been positive. Many Members, including some from the new Member States, have asked me to take action above all at the border with Russia because lorries are being vandalised there. I consequently believe that action is required there too, and the pilot project launched by the Commission must be continued. As far as I am concerned, then, I am committed to going further in this direction.

In conclusion, I must say that sometimes the good is the enemy of the best, and when we manage to produce a legislative text which may perhaps prompt reservations but on which there is a consensus, we can consider ourselves satisfied. Once again, I am grateful to Mr Markov. The directive undoubtedly represents a fair compromise. Some may perhaps have preferred a regulation, but Member States which have already introduced the procedures we are discussing will not be obliged to change them – and I reiterate this point – while Member States without experience in this area will be able to benefit from the exchange of good practice fostered by the directive, which has hitherto been insufficient. Moreover, the results of the research projects will be available to Member States so as to enable them to implement the directive in full.

Mr Markov, I shall conclude by thanking you once again for your patience and for the mediating skills you have demonstrated. You are obviously a good politician. Thank you, and thank you, Mr President.

Mr President, I would like to thank all our fellow Members once again for the debate. There are at least two things which have become clear. Firstly, road safety is something that we are all concerned about, and secondly, the question is how far do we go to tackle this at European level, and there are very different views on that.

Of course, I was very pleased to see that other colleagues were also calling for binding annexes. Unfortunately, in the Committee on Transport and Tourism I was unable to achieve an extension of this directive to road infrastructure outside the trans-European road network. One of the recitals now states that this is possible, and I hope, of course, that the Commission will bring forward a new proposal at a later date, as I believe this is necessary.
This, then, is the first small step. If we were to compare it with a person, it is not a large step, a step that you or I could take. It is, perhaps, a small step that a six- or seven-month-old baby might take on its tiny feet. Let us hope that the directive produces results very quickly and minimises the number of road fatalities, for that is our main concern and that is what we are seeking to achieve. Once again, thank you to everyone, and congratulations on your appointment, Commissioner.

President. − The debate is closed.

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

Written statements (Rule 142)

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing. − (RO) This directive is absolutely necessary, especially for the major road infrastructure projects. Nevertheless, we should not forget that the important aspects related to safety fall to the responsibility of Member States, according to the principle of subsidiarity, as a shared responsibility.

As designed, and partly achieved, the trans-European road network is one of the safest in the world. Major problems related to the overall infrastructure safety and traffic safety are not either in the TEN-T or, mostly, on the highways, but there are problems on the usual roads, especially outside the cities.

For this reason, thorough analyses, building projects designed and achieved with competence, as well as an efficient audit, are necessary particularly in the regional and local road network and, for this reason, I consider that Member States should take over all the healthy principles and implement them responsibly not only where they are bound to but, especially, where they are necessary.

Being designed as non-mandatory, especially from the bureaucratic-administrative point of view, the rules established by this directive should be adopted as a set of good practices for the continuous improvement of procedures for the management of all road infrastructures across the entire European Union.

18. Future of the sheep/lamb and goat sector in Europe (debate)

President. − The next item is the report (A6-0196/2008) by Liam Aylward, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on the future of the sheep/lamb and goat sector in Europe (2007/2192(INI)).

Liam Aylward, Rapporteur. − (GA) Mr President, the sheep and goat sectors are very important for the economy and environment in Europe. Sheep and goat farming is even more important in remote areas and in mountainous regions, where it is often depended on from an economic and agricultural perspective. It does not adversely impact the environment and it protects the rural landscape.

But yet, the future of this industry is currently under pressure in the European Union. Sheep production has fallen 12.5% since 2000. Farmers are leaving this occupation as the work is hard and income is too low. Sheepmeat consumption is in decline, as some feel it is too expensive and difficult to cook. This is particularly true among younger people. There is also increased competition in the market from other countries.

Sheepmeat production will fall 10% by the year 2015 unless something is done now. This sector should be looked at under the CAP ‘Health Check’, and prompt action should be taken.

Mr President, since being appointed rapporteur for this report in June 2007, I have opened up a wide-ranging series of discussions with interested parties, including farming organisations, representatives from the lamb-processing sector and consumer organisations. Ernst and Young compiled a very thorough study of the sheep and goat sectors, for which I would like to thank them. I consulted with the Agriculture Commissioner, Mrs Fischer Boel, and various European agriculture ministers, who were all very supportive to me in compiling this report. At all times I try to remain realistic in the proposals I put forward.

Very briefly I would highlight the main recommendations of the report.

Firstly, the introduction of a new environmental sheep-maintenance scheme which would allow sheep farmers to be paid under on a per-ewe basis, in recognition of the positive environmental attributes associated with the maintenance of sheep production, to be co-financed by national and European Union funding.
Secondly, an additional payment for traditional mountain breeds in order to preserve sheep in sensitive areas.

Thirdly, an EU regulation for the labelling of sheep meat products which would have an EU-wide logo to allow consumers to distinguish between EU products and those from third countries; this would be underwritten by a number of criteria, including farm assurance schemes and a country of origin indication, thus ensuring that consumers are fully aware of the point of origin of the product.

Fourthly, a review of the introduction of the compulsory electronic identification system for sheep, scheduled for 31 December 2009. Due to the difficulty in implementation, high cost and unproven benefits, we propose allowing each Member State the discretion to decide whether to introduce electronic tagging on a voluntary basis if they so wish.

Fifthly, an increase in the current annual European Commission food promotion budget which is valued at EUR 45 million for 2008, the ring-fencing of funding for EU lamb, and changes and simplifications to the practical rules governing the operation of this budget so that lamb products can be given meaningful access to this budget.

Sixthly, that the European Commission bring forward proposals on price transparency in this sector to provide information to consumers and producers.

Seventhly, a review of existing import quota management regimes by the European Commission so as to ensure that EU-produced lamb is not exposed to unfair competition and that the option of sensitive produce status for sheep meat products be available to the European Union.

Eighthly, support for the European Commission in research and development in the small ruminant industry, concentrating on both technical innovation for farms and product innovation.

Ninthly, as part of the simplification process in the review of the common agricultural policy health check, which is taking place over the next eight months, the European Commission must allow 14 days’ notice to be given to livestock farmers for on-farm cross-compliance inspections.

Finally, the setting-up of an EU implementation task force comprising members of the European Commission, the presidency and the Council. This EU implementation task force will oversee the practical reforms needed so as to make the European sheep sector viable, competitive and profitable.

I would ask my colleagues to support this report as I believe, if implemented, it will go a long way to help save the sheep and goat sectors in the European Union.

**Antonio Tajani, Member of the Commission.** — (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am standing in for Commissioner Fischer Boel, who of course knows this sector better than I do.

Nevertheless, as Vice-President Mauro knows, I hail from a region of Italy whose history, whose raison d'être consisted of sheep and goat farming. My name actually derives from the shoes formerly worn by shepherds. It is therefore a particular pleasure for me to be able to express the Commission’s opinion on this topic.

I should like to begin by thanking Mr Aylward for taking the initiative of presenting this report. As Mrs Fischer Boel stated recently when putting forward the proposals on the CAP Health Check, farmers are the custodians of the countryside: they protect our shared natural heritage, and in many rural areas they continue to represent the beating heart of the economy.

I would add that, in my opinion, this is especially true for sheep farmers. Having said that, I think we all agree that the sheep and goat sector deserves special attention. It is nonetheless important to distinguish between two very different sets of circumstances within this sector: on the one hand, extensive farming, which is more beneficial for the environment but often less profitable for those practising it, and on the other, intensive farming systems, which are more competitive but less environmentally sustainable.

It is important to recall, in this connection, that the purpose of the recent CAP reforms was to make agriculture in the European Union more efficient and competitive, but at the same time to ensure its sustainability. The Health Check will now confirm the validity of this twofold objective. We cannot of course maintain artificial restrictions which prevent farmers from meeting rising demand, but at the same time we must pursue a policy of protecting the environment.
The Commission has therefore proposed, as part of the CAP Health Check, stronger and better targeted support for environmentally-sensitive production. One proposal made on these grounds is to maintain coupled aid for sheep and goats. We are suggesting in addition that the existing Article 69 be applied more flexibly, making it possible for the sheep sector in particular to benefit from it.

Finally, we propose firming up the rural development policy with a view to safeguarding the environment and the rural landscape, as well as creating jobs and encouraging growth and innovation in rural areas, paying particular attention to outlying and depopulated areas or areas that are heavily dependent on farming.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that the new proposals offer numerous opportunities to the sheep and goat sector. Once the discussions have been finalised and the conclusions reached in Parliament and the Council, it will be up to the operators in the sector to exploit these opportunities as best they can.

James Nicholson, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Mr President, can I first of all welcome the new Commissioner to his post. I look forward to working with him in the years to come and wish him well in taking up his post as Commissioner with a heavy responsibility. I know he is not involved in his own particular area tonight and he is speaking for Mariann Fischer Boel but I have little doubt – and I accept what he says – that his background knowledge in the area is quite good.

Like many politicians he came from this House. I am so delighted to see a Commissioner who actually was a Member, who actually knows what Members think and what Members feel. So, Commissioner, I hope you will not take personally some of the things I might say tonight but you will take them back to Mariann Fischer Boel and tell her what I really think.

The report that comes before this House regarding the sheep and goat industry is timely and has comprehensively addressed the particular problems which the sector is currently facing.

The sheep and goat sector has come through many years of being non-profitable. The industry has been demoralised by low prices, cheap imports and a low price for wool. Sheep production is usually based mainly in mountainous and less-favoured areas where there are no farming alternatives. As young people look to the future they see that they cannot survive on the present income that this sector provides. They are therefore turning their backs on sheep and goat farming.

The mid-term review did not bring any improvement to the financial viability of this sector. Under the present health check the sector must receive special attention and we must look to see how we can best improve the overall viability.

I have to say that the Commission proposal to bring in electronic tagging as proposed will destroy the industry. If ever there has been a proposal that has not been thought through, this is it. The industry simply cannot afford to pay for this. Most of the time, in fact, the tag would actually cost more than the animal might even be worth.

The Commission could ease fears by accepting our amendment to postpone the proposal until 2012. This would allow time to see if the technology associated with tagging improves and if the cost comes down. Then and only then can we really improve the traceability that the Commission requires.

Let me now deal with the proposal for a task force, which always seems to be put forward as a solution to any problem, be it in the national estate or in Europe. The agriculture industry is littered with task force reports that have emerged in a blaze of glory only to enter the dustbin of history, never having achieved their stated goals.

They are always well meaning but, unless you have the follow-through and the financial support, such reports will be doomed to fail.

I fear this will be no different. There is an urgent need to develop the momentum behind this report. The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development should have a report every six months on the state of play in the industry and what is being done to develop and improve the sector.

Bernadette Bourzai, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I must first of all thank the rapporteur, Mr Aylward, for the excellent work he has done in consulting the professionals and the sheep and goat sector and for the very comprehensive report that he has submitted to us.
The sheep, lamb and goat sector has had a rough ride over the last ten years as a result of a series of crises, including epizootic-type diseases, but more especially because of the decoupling of aid, which has led to a marked decline in the sheep and lamb population as breeders quit the industry. The sector is currently experiencing real difficulties and it is now time for us to sit up and take notice, for this sector is capable of producing high-quality meat and milk and it plays a key role in ensuring the natural upkeep and improvement of the local terrain, which also includes reducing the risk of fire and natural disasters.

I support the proposals that have been put forward by our rapporteur and by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development relating to financial support for the production and promotion of agricultural products. Faced with foreign imports that already total nearly one quarter of European production, I believe that it is important to develop a European quality mark that can be used in addition to local and national origin labels.

I also think that the introduction of an electronic tagging system on the date set by the European institutions will only be possible if the European Union first provides the necessary funding, for the industry itself in its present predicament would not be capable of doing so. Unlike the previous speaker, I believe that setting up an implementation task force would be an appropriate step, but in my opinion this should include representatives from the professional organisations so that developments in the field can be closely monitored.

Finally, I would remind you that we need to act as a matter of some urgency, and certainly by next year, if we want to save this sector, for I fear that using Article 69, which has now become Article 68, as a health check for sectors in crisis will simply come too late in the day.

Alyn Smith, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group – Mr President, I would add my own congratulations to the rapporteur this evening. I have been delighted to support this report since I first saw it and continue that support tonight on behalf of my group.

Mr Aylward has clearly consulted very widely with the industry – the people who know what they are talking about – and that shines through in this report which could provide a few examples of best practice to a few other rapporteurs.

I will pick up on two issues. The proposal to have an implementation task force is absolutely fundamental. We regularly come up with umpteen ‘Christmas lists’ in this Parliament and they do not necessarily go much further into actual reality. Scotland’s and Europe’s sheep farmers do need a better deal and we do need to have regular updates on how this industry is doing and what we need to do to fix it.

The second issue which will be of no surprise to colleagues is sheep identification and electronic tagging. I would appreciate it as well if the Commissioner, whom I welcome to his new post, could perhaps bring a fresh pair of eyes – as opposed to a pair of tags – to this issue, even though it is not within his remit, and accept that this well-meaning but deeply flawed proposal is precisely what the sheep and goat sector of Europe does not need at this time or at all.

It is flawed for three reasons: the proposals are impractical in that what works on a Brussels flipchart will not work in the dead of winter up a hill in Scotland; they are unproven: even the manufacturers of this technology admit that they need a great deal of work; and they are badly timed because the economic implications could put vast numbers of farmers out of business completely.

So Mr Aylward’s report is excellent. I am delighted to support it but we have still got plenty of work to do.

Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, as I take the floor on behalf of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group in this debate, I should like to draw attention to four issues.

Firstly, the 2003 reform of the common agricultural policy, which involved decoupling direct payments from production, resulted in a sustained decline in the number of sheep and goats bred in EU territory.

Secondly, other factors have contributed to the decline of this sector. These include higher than average production costs, mainly relating to fuel, electricity and feed. In addition, an undue amount of meat has been imported from third countries where farmers are not bound by such strict rules on livestock farming.

Thirdly, this type of livestock farming plays an important role in protecting the natural environment, including maintaining less fertile ground by natural methods and preserving biodiversity. It also helps to protect the landscape. Furthermore, sheep and goats are raised in areas that are, for all intents and purposes, unsuitable for any other farming activity.
Fourthly, urgent action is needed to protect the sheep and goat sector at European Union level. In particular, this should involve introducing a system of income support for producers so as to encourage them to develop this type of production.

Ilda Figueiredo, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (PT) It is well-known that sheep and goat farming is extremely important, particularly in less favoured and mountain areas, as it helps to keep people on the land, naturally upkeep less fertile areas, and preserve landscapes and sensitive ecosystems. It also helps to prevent forest fires, for example in my country.

Having said this, production in the European Union is not meeting demand and the number of animals is constantly decreasing. It is therefore essential to adopt measures that will help to improve producer incomes and increase the production of meat, milk, cheese and other products in order to encourage young farmers into the sector and to support family-based small and medium-sized holdings.

Urgent action is needed through a range of support measures, mainly financial, bearing in mind the high cost of production, the epizootics which frequently affect these animals and the paucity of technical support in various areas, particularly medical and veterinary support.

We must look at the huge gap between the low prices paid to producers by intermediaries and large supermarkets and the very high prices paid by the end consumer. This means that the Commission and Member States must give absolute priority to this problem of the transparency of prices in the sector.

However, in particular, we must encourage the formation of associations, guarantee a movement towards fair prices for meat, milk and cheese produced on a small scale and establish local markets, bringing producers and consumers closer together.

To stop the decline in sheep and goat meat production seen in the European Union since 2003 when the common agricultural policy was reformed and the Single Payment Scheme was introduced, with subsidies no longer being linked to production, the new review must change this situation by adopting the necessary measures. These must include extraordinary support for introducing the electronic identification system which, as has already been said, must only be voluntary, at least in this phase, so as not to overburden producers.

I must also stress the importance of guaranteeing an additional payment for producers of rare native, traditional and regional breeds of sheep and goats. This type of production must be increased in mountain and other specific areas in order to preserve biological diversity in agriculture and keep these animals in sensitive areas.

Finally, I want to reaffirm the need to support, through a range of measures, the production of traditional cheeses from the milk of these animals. We must keep alive the artisanal processes that have survived to date and that form part of our cultural heritage and we must guarantee that shepherds and other producers of meat and milk from sheep and goats have the option of continuing their cheese production and selling this directly to consumers at local markets.

I must thank the rapporteur for his report.

Jean-Claude Martinez (NI). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, we are dealing with a serious subject, namely the gradual disappearance of Europe’s sheep and Europe’s shepherds. There are a billion sheep in the world, but Europe only has 97 million, in other words less than 10%, and when it comes to ewes the situation is even worse, for there are now only 67 million of them in Europe. Admittedly the UK may create an illusion with its 15 million head of sheep and Spain too with its 16 million, while Chairman Parish’s Ireland is self-sufficient to the tune of 333%. France, however, has seen its flocks decline from nearly 13 million animals some 25 years ago to about 8 million today and this will decrease further to a mere 5 million by 2015. In France one out of every two legs of lamb consumed is sourced abroad. Even worse than that it is the lactating ewes that are disappearing.

Of course the causes are well known: massive increase in the cost of feed, reduced consumption levels, the difficult life of the sheep farmer, catarrhal fever, falling prices, decoupling of aid and, above all, duty-free imports of mutton and lamb from New Zealand. Some 227 000 tonnes arrive from New Zealand every year, i.e. twice the French production level. It is not a case of wolves eating sheep; it is a case of New Zealand sheep eating European ones. A century and a half ago New Zealand had 1 million head of sheep; today it has 40 million. Over the same period the French figure has fallen from 30 million to 8 million.
So what can we do? We need a major European plan for the sheep and lamb industry, the willingness to pay a subsidy of EUR 15 for each lactating ewe and a sheep subsidy that is 125% of the cattle subsidy, loans to help modernise livestock buildings, conveniently located abattoirs, a European risk-insurance fund for livestock farmers, an assistance scheme and, why not Erasmus grants so that young shepherds can go to learn their trade in Spain or Italy. Thank you, Mr President. If we have sheep we have civilisation.

**Neil Parish (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, thank you. Well, Mr Martinez, I knew that New Zealand sheep were guilty of many things, but I did not realise they ate other sheep, especially European ones!

But, to be serious, I thank the rapporteur for a very good report. Can I echo the words of Mr Nicholson that it is great to see you here, Commissioner, and I am glad to see that you come from a sheep-keeping area of Italy, so I am sure you will be able to shed light on this whole project.

Sheep farming is extremely good, not only for farming but for the environment, and we talk a great deal today about a great environment for agriculture. But it is in the high-landscape areas, the mountainous areas, the hilly areas in my own area that I represent – Exmoor and Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor – that the green landscape is kept by sheep farming.

Sheep meat and lamb meat is a very healthy red meat. It is also a meat that is fed on grass, and when we now are living in an age where people are saying it takes eight kilos of grain to create one kilo of protein, then do not forget grass-fed meat is extremely valuable.

We must go out and market this, because it is a healthy meat but it needs to be marketed, and that is where I say to the rapporteur in his report: marketing is extremely important.

I actually want to see a form of grassland payment paid to sheep farmers to keep the sheep on the hillside. I do not want a coupled payment, because I believe all that may do is maintain more sheep than the landscape needs to keep. We have got to have the right number there to keep the landscape but have a good quality sheep that can then be marketed properly.

Electronic tagging: we are not ready for it. And when you are halfway up a mountain in driving rain, you try to read these new-fangled monitors and the answer is you will not be able to do it. There is no system yet that properly stops the collision of the numbers on the different sheep. And do not forget you are talking about millions and millions of sheep in the European Union. We are just not ready, and I would say: leave it to 2012 or beyond.

**Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, the European sheep and lamb sector has for a number of years been experiencing a serious crisis that is taking it to the brink of collapse, as has already been mentioned.

The traditionally low profitability of this sector has been aggravated by the rise in the price of feed as well as the massive decrease in consumption of these products.

Mr Aylward's report correctly depicts the sector and emphasises its key role in supporting populations in the most sensitive and vulnerable areas and in maintaining the natural environment it inhabits.

It seems evident that neither the market nor the current CAP aid will be sufficient to keep this sector afloat, especially since the current regulatory production costs are causing a loss of competitiveness in comparison to imported products, which do not have to meet the same requirements.

If we do not act, there is a serious risk that these undertakings may disappear and with them one of the most important economic activities, if not the only one, in many of Europe's rural areas, which will pose a serious problem in terms of land use management.

My Group supports the rapporteur's report and if we tabled amendments it was purely with a view to improving it. We are concerned not only about the traditional breeds, which are certainly in danger, but also this stockbreeding profession itself, which is also in danger.

Although Mr Smith seems to believe that only Scotland has sheep, there are also some in Spain. We are in fact the second largest producer after the United Kingdom, as has been mentioned, and we believe that the electronic identification system is the only way to guarantee the traceability of herds and the only way to ensure that EU labelling is completely reliable.
My Group is calling for Community financing mechanisms to facilitate its introduction by the date envisaged. We also want the Commission to include in the strategy for this sector the revival of the activities of shepherds, milking professionals and shearsers, which are disappearing.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, the situation of the sheep and goat sector indicates that the common agricultural policy is in crisis. It provides further evidence that the agricultural policy is not meeting expectations and that maintaining it in its current form will result in the loss of food security.

We have experienced a crisis in the market in cereals, when it proved necessary to take 2 900 000 hectares out of set-aside. Then there was a crisis in the milk market, caused by a restrictive policy and the imposition of penalties on farmers. The milk quota had to be increased quickly by 2%, which does not allow commitments to be properly met in the future.

It now appears that we also have a crisis in the sheep and goat sector. The situation regarding horses and many crops is also serious. In short, the agricultural policy must be changed, but not under pressure from industry. We cannot allow additional burdens to be imposed and paid for by breeders and consumers. I have in mind, for example, the electronic tagging of sheep.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I should like to say thank you and welcome to the Commissioner. If you have not heard it already, Commissioner, the message coming very clearly from this House is that electronic tagging is a very bad idea and it must be put to bed. If this report – and I thank Liam Aylward for his work on it – achieves anything, I would hope that it would achieve a bit of realism on electronic tagging of sheep. You have heard the reasons – it is not practical, it is too costly and sheep farmers quite simply will not wear it.

Irish sheep farmers are in an angry mood at the moment – as you know, we have taken a vote on the Lisbon Treaty – and it would be rather practical if the Commission could say, 'Let's listen to them and put this one to bed'. Do not bring it in.

I would like to say a few things about the report, which details the problems in the sheep sector and does it particularly well. The real solution for sheep farmers is better market prices and, if we cannot get those, a better share of the price we, as consumers, pay for lamb. We need to encourage young people to start eating this meat which, as you have heard, is a healthy product. So measures in terms of marketing initiatives to help that are very important.

I worry about Article 69. We are simply cross-subsidising between farmers and I am not so sure that would go down very well with farmers from whom the money will be taken.

I support the idea of an environmental-linked payment but I am a little concerned. We had them before and there were problems on the mountains because of it. Then – guess what – we decoupled, hoping to solve that problem, and now we are trying to recouple. But the sheep sector needs additional payments to keep farmers in business, particularly in sensitive areas.

Moving on to the task force: I am not a great fan of task forces but I am happy to support this idea if the rapporteur, as he has said, is prepared to stick with it and make sure work happens. Could I ask the Commission to clarify how many people, if any, are working in the Commission on sheepmeat? I gather very few. I think there is one person, but I would like to know.

Briefly, the experience in Ireland of a sheep strategy report is not good. A year and a half ago EUR 28 million were promised, with great fanfare, to Irish farmers. Guess what? To date EUR 9 000 have been delivered. I hope this report does somewhat better.

Giovanna Corda (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I would first like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Aylward, for the work that he has done on this report, which is aimed at reviving the sheep and goat sector in Europe. These industries are in real danger because their production levels have been steadily declining for a number of years.

Producers now prefer to switch to other types of product because prices have fallen dramatically and can no longer guarantee them a sufficient income. What is more, European consumers, and especially the younger generation, have lost interest in products of this kind. We need to revive these sectors because not only meat but milk and cheese too are the natural products of our land and we should be promoting them. It is vital that we maintain these sectors for a number of reasons.
The first is that the milk sector, like the meat sector, represents a tradition and a skill that we should continue to offer to our consumers. Secondly, these two sectors also provide employment for those engaged in the production, processing and sale of these products. Nor should we forget that sheep and goat farms are often located in isolated, mountainous or insular areas. I know this because I was born in Sardinia, a region that I know very well, where opportunities for diversification are very limited. What is more, sheep and goats play a beneficial role in protecting the environment. This is why we have to ensure that these livestock farms are maintained and that the market in sheep and goat products is revived.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, I believe that the report before us contains many provisions that could, if implemented, prove beneficial to the future of the sheep and goat sector in Europe. The measure providing for the introduction of additional support for sheep farming in mountainous regions and in areas where sheep farming is the only form of farming would, in my view, be particularly valuable.

This sector is not very lucrative and has been experiencing many problems for quite some time. A fall in production and consumption has been accompanied by a rise in imports and production costs. In addition, the current outbreak of bluetongue and consequent restrictions imposed on the movement and marketing of animals has created additional socio-economic difficulties.

It should be emphasised that the sector’s problems stem, inter alia, from decoupling payments and production. Support instruments should be proposed to assist in rebuilding sheep and goat stocks in the Union. I cannot imagine a situation where sheep have totally disappeared from the mountain landscape; they are quite simply part of that landscape.

In view of the financial situation of the sector, it is hard to justify the introduction of electronic tagging for sheep and goats. Once again, the cost of introducing new chips would have to be borne by the EU’s farmers. I believe that we should focus instead on finding ways to increase the consumption of lamb and goat meat. Both are very beneficial from a nutritional point of view.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Mr President, for the sheep farmers of my country, Cyprus, the main problem for the last year has been the confusing and, as it transpired, apparently false results relating to foot-and-mouth-disease diagnosis which were supplied by an animal disease reference laboratory in the UK. This animal disease laboratory is used by the Commission as a reference laboratory. The results it supplied led to thousands of animals being killed and to a catastrophe for many sheep farmers on the island.

This laboratory, I note, is the same place from where the virus escaped a few months earlier, causing an outbreak in the UK with devastating results for the farmers there.

May I call on the Commission to take a second, more critical, look at the standards of the animal disease reference laboratories it uses, in order to make sure that their scientific credibility is of the required highest level?

Wiesław Stefan Kuc (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, I am sorry to have to say that the report by Mr Aylward is actually more about rescuing the sheep and goat sector in Europe than about ensuring its future.

We hardly noticed when sheep and goats, like horses, practically disappeared from our landscape. No longer do we hear the sound of bells or barking dogs. Products derived from local raw materials are disappearing too. I am referring to products such as milk, meat, wool and leather.

I believe that there is still a chance of saving the breeding of these animals, at least in certain areas. If we fail to implement at least the measures proposed by the rapporteur, zoos will be the only place where will be able to see these creatures in future. If production is not profitable, we can of course buy in supplies from New Zealand, Australia and other countries. We should, however, strive to save our own fauna, of which sheep and goats are a part. It is important to bear that in mind.

Antonio Tajani, Member of the Commission. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it seems that all of us here this evening come from regions where pasture farming exists and there is a keen interest in the sheep and goat sector. For this reason I need to – and certainly shall – inform my colleagues Mrs Fischer Boel and Mrs Androulla Vassiliou of everything that has been said in this House and all the requests made by Members.

Mrs McGuinness, I fully understand Parliament’s position on the sensitive issue of tagging. I shall, as I said, inform the Commissioner responsible of the view expressed by several Members this evening. I do understand
Parliament’s concerns, and I hope that together with Commissioner Fischer Boel we can find a positive solution.

I believe and trust that, once the debate in Parliament and the Council is completed, the Health Check will provide an adequate response to many of the concerns raised by the rapporteur and raised during this debate by many Members regarding the future of the sheep and goat sector.

Solutions to some of the questions could be at hand in the near future. We are working towards an agreement on the agricultural aspects of the Doha Development Agenda, which should be finalised before the summer break. This should shed more light on the question the rapporteur has raised about sensitive products.

As concerns promotion, we are open to all constructive suggestions but, as I have mentioned, we are committed to the principle of targeted support for Community products of clearly identifiable quality.

Another issue has arisen with regard to the future of this sector, which I personally – but the other Commissioners, too – consider absolutely vital for the economy of the European Union, but above all that of certain mountainous regions and regions with a particularly difficult hydrogeological system.

I therefore wished to respond to the suggestion of creating a group of Commission and Member State representatives to monitor developments in this sector. Concerning the creation of such a group, it goes without saying that comments and proposals from Member States and from stakeholders are always welcomed by the Commission, which, I believe, must become even more open to requests from across the European Union. Nevertheless, various bodies with responsibility for this sector do already exist within the Commission.

The Management Committee for Sheep and Goats issues opinions on the legislation relating to the sector. The forecasting group for the ovine and caprine sectors is made up of market experts and meets twice a year to discuss market trends and forecasts. The conclusions of those meetings are forwarded to the Advisory Group on Sheepmeat and Goatmeat, which also meets twice a year and represents the entire sector, from farm to fork. This last group also discusses a wide range of subjects which its members can propose for inclusion on the agenda.

It seems to me that the formation of another working group would involve an additional administrative burden and would in a sense duplicate the functions of the existing management system; it would in fact conflict with the aim of simplifying the CAP.

I am nevertheless prepared – and I believe I can also speak for Commissioner Fischer Boel here – to explore any possibilities existing within the present framework.

Liam Aylward, rapporteur. – Mr President, it was remiss of me not to welcome the new Commissioner, to thank him and to wish him well. I should of course also like to thank all the speakers here tonight, particularly the shadow rapporteurs, for their contributions.

I would also like to thank the Slovenian Presidency for their support over the last six months, during which they agreed that the development of the sheep sector would be put on the agenda of the Council of Agriculture Ministers in March. This gave the Agriculture Ministers across the Community an opportunity to discuss the crisis.

My thanks also to the Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Neil Parish, who has been very helpful and supportive.

Briefly, I want to refer to the amendments and matters raised here tonight. I have heard the view from the Commission in relation to the implementation task force. Now I know I am right because they are against it. I find it very difficult to agree to Amendment 2. Some proposals have been made to me. If we can get proper wording I have no difficulty with that, but I will not dilute the importance of what we are trying to achieve.

Again, my view on electronic identification has always been clear. I am against it – not least due to the high costs involved – but also the benefits are unproven and there are difficulties in implementation. I have, however, always stated that each Member State should be allowed the option of introducing this system on a voluntary basis. Therefore I am unable to support Amendment 4 but I can support Amendment 1 by the PPE-DE Group deferring the implementation of the system until 2012 at the earliest.

All the other amendments proposed I will accept. I am not going to go through them now but I can accept Amendments 6, 7, 8, 9, 3 and 5.
I think it is worth pointing out that since 2003 it has been stated that any sector in the common agricultural policy facing difficulty or disadvantage will be prioritised in the context of the CAP health check. In the forthcoming check I would ask the Commissioner for Agriculture to ensure that the interests of the sheep and goat sector are comprehensively addressed.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish the French presidency well over the next six months. They will be very important to this report. I have met with the French Minister for Agriculture, Mr Barnier, who is already committed to having a discussion on these sectors at the November meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers. I am confident that he, who has a well-informed understanding of the challenges that the sheep and goat sector faces, will do his utmost to ensure that the necessary proposals in this report on the future of the sheep and goat sectors are implemented in the context of the CAP health check.

**President.** − The debate is closed.

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

**Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Andrzej Tomasz Zapałowski (UEN), in writing. (PL)** Sheep farming is one of the sectors of animal production that has received less attention recently in comparison to pig or cattle farming.

Sheep farming is, however, particularly important for countries with difficult geographical conditions. It is also important for regions where, for reasons of historical tradition, the rearing and consumption of lamb is very important to the population.

Care should be taken to ensure that this sector does not collapse. This is particularly relevant now that we are witnessing rocketing food prices. We simply cannot afford to restrict this production.

I fully support the rapporteur’s proposal to introduce additional payments aimed at traditional mountain breeds in order to protect sheep in sensitive areas. I also support the proposal to identify mutton with an EU logo so as to distinguish it from third-country products. We are duty bound to assist the citizens of Europe to differentiate between good food and food that might not comply with European standards.

**19. Agenda of the next sitting : see Minutes**

**20. Closure of the sitting**

(The sitting was closed at 11.10 p.m.)