

WEDNESDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2007

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

1. Opening of the sitting

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

2. Fight against terrorism (debate)

President. – The next item is the joint debate on the following oral questions:

– O-0046/2007 by Mr Weber, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, Mrs Roure, on behalf of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Mr Alvaro, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and Mrs Muscardini and Mrs Angelilli, on behalf of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, to the Council on the fight against terrorism (B6-0139/2007) and

– O-0051/2007 by Mr Weber and Mr Daul, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, Mrs Roure, on behalf of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Mr Alvaro, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and Mrs Muscardini and Mrs Angelilli, on behalf of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, to the Commission on the fight against terrorism (B6-0313/2007).

Kathalijne Maria Buitenweg (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, could I ask that we do not start until the Council is here, because I find it quite strange that we have put oral questions to the Council, as well as the Commission, and are discussing this issue only with the Commission. There is no point. Could I ask that we stop whatever we are going to do until the Council is here to listen to us?

President. – If you will pardon my saying so, Mrs Buitenweg, I do not consider that appropriate, as we have no idea when the Council will arrive. We may be waiting so long that we are unable to hold our debate at all. In addition, the debate opens with speeches by the political group spokesmen. I therefore propose that we make a start on these.

Does the House agree to this?

(Parliament decided to start the debate)

Joseph Daul (PPE-DE), author. – (FR) Mr President, President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, the fight against terrorism is an area in which Europe has to switch from the virtual to the real. The global dimension of terrorism calls for a global response. Building a political Europe involves the ability to eradicate the scourge of terrorism; we are still very wide of the mark. Our group has taken the initiative of having this debate because we believe that Europe has not yet fully realised the extent of the dangers facing it.

The first, very immediate threat is the threat to our day-to-day security from Islamist and other terrorist groups, such as ETA in Spain. We see it every day, Commissioner. The second threat, just as worrying, is that these powerful networks could hijack the political culture of European democracies to undermine our essential values and replace them with their religious principles. We need to make sure that our Member States cooperate more in the fight against international terrorism. The resignation in March of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Mr de Vries, and the failure to replace him as yet, shows how much work there is still to be done. It is true that Mr de Vries resigned for personal reasons, but it is well known that the inadequacy of the resources he was given meant that he was unable to complete the difficult task given to him.

We are asking the Council, which is not present, its President, and also the High Representative for the CFSP, Mr Solana, and the President of the Commission, Mr Barroso, to fulfil their responsibilities and appoint a new EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator with adequate resources, as soon as possible.

Ladies and gentlemen, the fight against terrorist organisations requires the greatest firmness and cannot include negotiations or concessions. Terrorist organisations are not the traditional centralised formations that can be overcome by conventional military operations. They operate as networks, using the most sophisticated technologies to carry out their criminal operations. It is only by continuing to pool substantial financial, human and intelligence resources that we will have a chance of neutralising those networks. By respecting each other, guaranteeing the implementation of laws and public freedoms, reaffirming our idea of what it is to be human and of life in society, and acting together, we will put an end to a terrorism that, while using 21st century means, is inspired by prejudices and makes use of methods from humanity's worst hours.

This is not, as people often say, a clash of civilisations but a confrontation between those who put respect for human beings and pluralism above everything, and those who, in the name of Jihad, would eliminate anyone who does not think like them or who holds other beliefs. The victims of September 11, whom we will be remembering in a few days' time, five years after the tragic events in Manhattan, but also those of March 11 in Madrid and of the London bombings, impel us to take resolute action. Europeans need security, security in their working lives, security in their supply of energy, and food security. The least we can do for Europe, after guaranteeing peace, is to do all we can to guarantee the most basic security, personal security.

Martine Roure (PSE), author. – (FR) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, many European instruments to fight terrorism have been introduced by Member States. Yet a number of European countries are continuing to face a significant terrorist threat and it is therefore appropriate, after several years of those instruments being in force, to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of European legislation in this area.

Despite measures to encourage the national authorities responsible for fighting terrorism to share information, there is clearly a need for greater mutual trust. To enable the fight against terrorism to be really effective, we do not need to add to existing legislation, but we do need to check that Member States are applying it correctly. I think that we should be focusing particularly on genuinely improving cooperation between Member States.

An evaluation would also enable us to review the regulations concerned. It seems necessary to me, in the process, to restore the balance between our fellow citizens' need for security and the safeguarding of their right to protection of privacy. Certain measures have been adopted that are very restrictive for our fellow citizens and we can see now, with the benefit of hindsight, that some of them have not had the results we anticipated and may, on the contrary, give a false impression of security.

The fight against terrorism also demands better cooperation between the European Union and its partners throughout the world. In our transatlantic relations, for example, we should insist on drawing up a common strategy to fight terrorism, which respects fundamental rights and privacy. The European Union should take a global approach to these issues in order to set the general principles for exchanging information with our US partners and for protecting data under these exchanges.

Finally, the European Parliament has often been kept out of the Council's debates on terrorism. I think it is important for us now to have a genuine debate leading to better democratic control by the European Parliament and by national parliaments.

Alexander Alvaro (ALDE), author. – (DE) Mr President, 2001-2007 has been six years of a politically motivated fight against terrorism. The only thing we have seen in these six years is the quest for a policy response to every measure taken. What I cannot make out, however, is an approach with regard to the development of European counter-terrorism policy in a global context. What role are we playing? What role do we want to play worldwide? Do we have an underlying plan?

To date, I have seen no plan or paper, either from the Commission or the Council – or, incidentally, from any Member State – proposing a short-, medium- and long-term counter-terrorism strategy. We have launched measures with short-term effect, stemming financial flows – which has been excellent. We have launched measures aiming to combat terrorism in the medium term by including biometric data in identity documents – which I, personally, do not consider to be the right approach, but was decided by a political majority.

With regard to the long term, I cannot see any progress or movement in the field of development assistance, which can be understood in the sense of security policy. Nor do I see any movement in terms of respect for those cultures in which terrorism can supposedly originate; that is, in terms of our making efforts to live a globalised existence, to coexist decently with each other in a globalised world, rather than going out and

trying to communicate our society to the rest of the world. The question, therefore, is: what role will Europe adopt?

The response since 11 September 2001 has consisted of manifold actionism: each time there is an attack, the respective governments have endeavoured to reassure the population by launching short-term measures, be it the British vehemence in pushing through data retention in the immediate aftermath of the tragic attacks in London, or Germany's endeavours to push through online searches. There is a lack of an underlying plan. Infringements of fundamental rights, as in the times of the emergency laws, will not solve the problem alone. If we wish to combat terrorism successfully we must define Europe's worldwide role in this fight, rather than pursuing national actionism, which is then carried out only in Europe.

Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), *author*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the fact that, having postponed this debate from July to September, we are now holding it in the present circumstances, with the absence of the Council on the issues that we want to raise, in itself demonstrates that Europe is in fact unprepared to tackle the problem of terrorism firmly and comprehensively and that this Parliament is unfortunately still too weak in political terms.

Once there were terrorist groups in the various nations of the EU, there were internal problems, Europe was already largely united and there was already talk of a common strategy that never materialised. We came to 2001 and learned that terrorism is a global phenomenon, that it is not a pyramid organisation but is formed of cells connected together mainly through the Internet and the best IT systems, with roots worldwide and able to strike how they want and when they want.

Despite this, there is no European Union policy for control of the Internet or to give definite security rules to citizens, who do not understand what measures have been adopted by the EU or are set to be adopted in the near future. The most important measure is imposing responsibility on providers which host sites that promote, support or justify terrorist activities, for example through the mandatory barring of sites that can be traced directly or indirectly to persons who preach, incite or justify violence. Switzerland has already been doing all this for a long time, while Europe is still hesitating and talking in vain.

There is no common position for monitoring sham religious meeting places or sham imams who, as also recently happened in the Netherlands and Italy, have used places that ought to have been devoted to prayers to sow hate, to plan attacks by inciting violence against the West, democracy, human rights, including women's rights, actually launching terrorist attacks in our cities.

It is no longer enough, Mr President, to talk of a common strategy against terrorism; we need strength and the courage to take decisions, to act with the goal, on the one hand, of preventing future attacks and, on the other, of neutralising the terrorist cells that lurk in the shadows and make converts by using our values of freedom, freedom of religion and of expression, to attack freedom itself.

The arrests just now in Denmark of persons suspected of planning an attack using explosives, demonstrate that this is no time to lower our guard and that the anti-terrorism laws adopted by Denmark are working, but they also sound the alarm throughout the EU. We can no longer allow ourselves to rely solely on the effectiveness of national laws and the efficiency of investigative forces from individual countries, but we need more coordination.

Too often, political correctness conceals an inability or reluctance to take decisions. What is at risk is democracy, freedom and the right of individuals to live in peace and freedom. Freedom is achieved through rules. We must do what is politically right to safeguard not only our own peoples but also those throughout the world who respect their rights and are aware of their duties. Any delay renders us complicit in wrongdoing.

Let us leave this debate with a joint undertaking to take immediate steps, not with supposed left-wing or right-wing positions, but strong and united. That will be the best form of homage to the memory of the lives that from September 11 until today have throughout the world been cut short by atrocities. May we each always consider terrorism a crime against humanity.

Kathalijne Maria Buitenweg (Verts/ALE), *author*. – (NL) Mr President, my most important question to the Council is actually whether it considers itself fallible. Is it conceivable that the Council makes mistakes from time to time, or is it all-knowing? Does the Council believe that all the measures taken in recent years in the fight against terrorism have been the right ones? Also, is it really beyond all doubt that no disproportionate infringement of civil rights has taken place? If the Council is infallible, it follows that there is no need for an evaluation, but if it believes in the possibility of improving its understanding, there is. I should also like the

Council to inform us during the course of the debate whether there are any particular measures it believes are missing, particular measures it now considers necessary that have not yet been taken. Indeed, are any measures currently planned? Infringements of civil rights are permitted under European law, but are warranted only if they meet the criteria of necessity, proportionality and effectiveness and if people are able to arm themselves against abuses. I should like to see an evaluation by the Council of all the measures taken over recent years, and also an examination of their compliance with these criteria. Can the Council promise us this today?

Allow me to highlight a few aspects that are in need of comprehensive evaluation. First of all, the aspect of abuse: is it not conceivable that citizens could become unwitting victims? I should like to give as an example the creation of the lists of terror suspects. The question in this regard is not only how people and organisations get included in these lists, but also how they get removed from them. Supposing your name appears on these lists. All your assets and bank deposits would be frozen, but the authorities would not automatically prosecute. This means there would be no legal proceedings in which to present evidence. The principle of innocent until proven guilty is abandoned. Besides, I can quite imagine bank deposits being frozen before the fact is divulged, or the money would be on the other side of the world in a flash. Yet I cannot imagine our accepting the fact of people remaining on lists and thus continuing to be punished without their guilt having been established. This is an unacceptable inversion of the burden of proof in criminal law. The Court of First Instance has already stated a number of times that the procedure must be amended. On 11 July the Al-Aqsa Foundation and José María Sison were judged to have been listed wrongfully. I should like to hear what lessons the Council has learned from these court rulings, and whether it is prepared to amend or evaluate the decision process regarding the composition of such lists, and also to look at opportunities for individuals to obtain justice.

Moving on to effectiveness: are the measures effective? I should like to take the measures on liquids as an example. More than one million people in Europe are still having to fiddle about with plastic bags before boarding their flight, obediently filling them with 100 ml bottles – which often end up in the bin because passengers have forgotten the rule – and there is no excessive breach of civil rights and abuse can be monitored. Is the measure effective, though? Is the Council prepared to assess this on the basis of scientific evidence?

This brings me to the subject of proportionality. Are the measures proportionate? This is another important aspect for evaluation. Let me take passenger data and the agreement with the United States as an example. My group, too, can fully appreciate countries' desire to know who is entering their territory. The main problem is not so much that excessive quantities of data are being requested, but that they can be requested for a great many different purposes. The Council always justifies such a measure by saying that all this is necessary for the fight against terrorism. However, the data can also be used for other purposes 'according to US law', as the agreement states. Thus it is theoretically possible that the purpose is not only to combat terrorism, but also to tackle bicycle theft or bank fraud. Is it proportionate to use the data for this? Is the Council prepared to review the agreement on these grounds, too?

Finally, necessity. I would take as an example the storage of traffic data for up to two years, which was opposed by my group but supported by the majority in this House. All the information I have seen to date, however, shows that data up to three months old are the most effective and necessary. Is the Council prepared to examine whether data stored for longer than three months are really being used? In short, is it prepared to carry out an evaluation based on the criteria of effectiveness, proportionality and necessity, and also to examine the possibility of combating abuse?

The last aspect for evaluation is the Council's position on breaches of human rights within the European Union, in connection with the CIA's activities. The European Parliament has investigated these as fully as possible, and it is scandalous, in my opinion, that we have never heard any comment from the Council. This might consist of what it thinks about this, which aspects of the report it agrees with and which it does not, and what kind of measures it intends to take. Is the Council prepared to give its reaction to the Fava report, or is it to persist in its silence?

Giusto Catania (GUE/NGL), *author*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we are accustomed to declaring that combating terrorism is a priority and invoking new political legislative initiatives.

I believe that we ought first to assess the choices that have been made over the last few years and ask some questions. Firstly: is terrorism stronger or weaker as a result of our legislative initiatives? Secondly: have we made a specific contribution to the development of our legal culture and our values, or have we betrayed them in the name of the terrorism crisis?

I believe we should make it a priority to answer these two questions, and that if we did so we would discover that emergency measures have often been mistaken and that the lists of terrorist organisations have been imprecise, often dictated more by political motives than a real danger posed by the organisations. We have appointed a person to coordinate counter-terrorism activities, and then we have found, without any clear reason, that we can do without the functions carried out by this person. I therefore ask the Council not to appoint a new counter-terrorism coordinator because over the last few months we have discovered that we can easily do without one.

We have often said, and we say it firmly, and I think that we ought to say it again in this Chamber, that terrorism is the enemy of our civilisation, it is the enemy of the rule of democracy: terrorism is barbarity. Terrorist attacks represent a move from the rule of law to a primitive state. All this is true, but instead of focusing the debate on the reinstatement of the rules of democracy we have chosen to tackle the issue by restricting the rules of civil coexistence. We have chosen to fight on our adversary's home ground, to compete on violations of human rights, on military controls over the civilian population, on the negation of the key principles of democracy.

The images of Abu Ghraib or of the Guantanamo base are the symbol of the victory by the culture of terrorism over our rule of law and the key principles of our legal culture. The other symbol is the CIA's flights and abductions in Europe, with the explicit involvement of European governments. There is an embarrassing silence about these events – as my fellow Members have done, I also call upon the Council to express itself on this point – there is an embarrassing silence, everyone has mentioned it! This Parliament has spoken about the responsibilities of the CIA, the responsibilities of European governments, the responsibilities of our intelligence services. The Commission has spoken and the Council of Europe is speaking about this. The only embarrassing silence is from the European governments and I believe that this is unacceptable. Let us hope that today the Council will state its view on this issue.

In Europe, unfortunately, the exception has become the rule and now we must have a clear debate on the effects produced by our legislative choices: biometric data in passports and visas, the system for control of personal data, databases on telephone communications, databases on air passengers, PNR agreements, the SWIFT system, the system of storing fingerprints and even the regulation on liquids, which we hope today to reject resoundingly, giving a signal to the Commission that we ought to make choices that are in proportion to what we want to combat.

I believe that we should say emphatically that we have chosen an authoritarian distortion of the rule of law instead of choosing to safeguard the rule of law in order to combat terrorism. It is not clear – and I am just finishing, Mr President – whether in the past few years European citizens have been put in more danger by terrorism or by the measures taken to combat terrorism. An American feminist writer has said that when we are offered solutions by those responsible for our problems we should be on our guard. I believe that we should be on our guard.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like first of all to apologise for arriving a little late at Parliament, purely and simply because I underestimated the traffic between the hotel and Parliament.

I should like also to greet Commissioner Frattini, who is here with us, and to try to reply to the questions put by Members; I hope to provide all the clarifications we were asked to give.

There is no doubt that recent events in London and Glasgow, as well as on the border between Spain and Portugal plus the attack in Yemen, have confirmed that terrorism represents a considerable threat to Europe's security and to the values of our democratic societies, particularly to the rights and freedoms of European citizens.

We are in no doubt that Member States must therefore continue to cooperate on strengthening and implementing counter-terrorism measures, while always respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are core values in our societies and their protection and promotion will help prevent terrorism.

Terrorism must be fought at both national and international levels. International cooperation is an essential tool for an effective fight against this scourge, at both national and multilateral levels. We know that terrorism represents a global threat and therefore needs a global concerted response, which will necessarily include increasing the flow and exchange of information, internal coordination of positions, coordination/partnerships with third countries, the implementation of a global counter-terrorism strategy with the United Nations

playing a leading role, and close collaboration with various regional and international organisations involved in combating terrorism.

Action by the European Union has intensified since 11 September 2001 and, subsequently, since the dreadful attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005. In December 2005 the Council adopted the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, under which the Union commits itself to combat terrorism globally while respecting human rights, allowing its citizens to live in an area of freedom, security and justice.

The EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy covers four strands of work: prevention, protection, pursuit and response. The Presidency confirms that the Council does in fact carry out a six-monthly review of the situation as regards implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy and of the strategy against terrorist financing and an annual evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism. The Council also reviews the Action Plan to Combat Terrorism every six months and the Action Plan on Radicalisation and Recruitment on an annual basis. This monitoring process enables the Council to pinpoint which of the measures proposed at EU level have not been adopted, or have not been duly implemented at Member State level. It also gives the Council an opportunity to take certain policies further. For example, the Presidency decided to speed up work in the field of explosives.

The adoption of certain measures in the field of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters has been slowed down by the need for unanimous decision-making in this field. The adoption and implementation of counter-terrorism measures will be speeded up by the ratification of the Treaty to be approved by the Intergovernmental Conference, on the basis of the mandate adopted by the European Council at its last meeting in June.

As regards the need for closer cooperation between the law enforcement and security information services, Member State security services are currently working in close and very efficient collaboration within the Counter-Terrorism Group. Europol has developed very effective analysis files that are increasingly supplied with information by Member State law enforcement services. There is no doubt that more needs to be done. The European Parliament maintains a close direct political dialogue with the Council and the Commission.

On 16 May 2007 the President of the Council, the Vice-President of the Commission and the Chairman of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs met to examine the various counter-terrorism policies and to take stock of the implementation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy. These six-monthly meetings are extremely useful for reaching a consensus on the policies to be developed in the field of combating terrorism. As regards the position of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, the Secretary-General/High Representative informed Member States that he was considering, in close collaboration with the Presidency, how best to coordinate work in the field of counter-terrorism within the Council. As regards the relation between the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and the Situation Centre, SitCen takes no part in the drawing up of EU counter-terrorism policy or in the coordination of work in the field of counter-terrorism carried out by the Council; nor does it monitor follow-up to the Council's decisions.

In the field of combating terrorism its competence is limited to presenting to the Council strategic assessments of terrorist threats on the basis of information received from the national services. It also supports the EU emergency and crisis coordination arrangements which may be implemented in order to help coordinate an EU level response to serious crises, which would potentially include terrorist attacks. That is a mechanical function which includes disseminating information, providing meeting facilities and supporting the institutions' existing decision-making arrangements. It is not a coordinating role. Nevertheless, it was on the basis of a threat assessment drawn up by SitCen that Council approved policy recommendations in various fields, such as the field of explosives, to prevent illegal use by terrorists.

The Presidency has no doubt that its efforts in the fight against terrorism are supported by European citizens who, moreover, at the time of the most recent attacks, amply demonstrated not only their solidarity with the victims of those attacks, but also their desire for an EU response to be developed. In the drawing up of such a counter-terrorism strategy the Presidency has the support of its partners who bring their ideas to the high-level discussions, and the European Parliament, in particular, plays a vital role.

Compliance with the provision in Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union is of paramount importance for the Council, as indeed is compliance with all the other articles of the Treaties. Cooperation and dialogue with third countries are the mainstays of the EU Counter-Terrorism strategy. In this half year alone there are plans for three-party style dialogue with Russia, the United States of America, Algeria and Morocco, which reflects the interest in broadening the dialogue with those countries. The European Union also maintains anti-terrorism dialogue with other countries and international organisations.

Then, as regards our Mediterranean partners, we shall be holding our customary *ad hoc* Euromed experts' meeting on terrorism, which will provide the opportunity to have wider discussions with our Mediterranean partners on a matter of vital interest in that region, and which will focus upon the implementation of priority areas of the Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism.

It should be mentioned that, with specific reference to the United States of America, the Presidency holds regular talks with various bodies and at the most varied levels on combating terrorism, which cover subjects such as radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism, including Internet use by extremist groups, terrorist threat analysis, cooperation in international forums, public/private partnerships for combating terrorism, specifically explosives safety, critical infrastructure protection, terrorist financing, in addition to other types of cooperation between civilian authorities and the police authorities.

The Portuguese Presidency is to organise, in conjunction with the United States, a workshop on the application of financial sanctions for combating terrorism. The question of respect for human rights in the fight against terrorism has also been broached by both parties on various occasions and the Presidency considers that it is very important to continue that dialogue which it regards as crucial for both sides.

In conclusion on this point, I would mention that strengthening the area of freedom, security and justice based on the Hague programme and the relevant plan of action, is one of the main priorities of the joint 18-month programme of the German, Portuguese and Slovenian Presidencies. The fight against terrorism is one of the great challenges in that area; the three Presidencies included among their aims greater cooperation to combat terrorism by means of implementing the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

With your permission now, Mr President, I should like to reply to Oral Question O-0053/07. I should like also to inform the House that the Council of the European Union makes a periodic review, as I mentioned, of the fight against terrorism and we also make an annual review of the Strategy and of the Action Plan for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism; then every six months we review the strategy to combat terrorist financing. The Council will shortly be presenting, for the first time, a report on the implementation of the communication strategy intended for the media and approved in July 2006. Under the terms of the Counter-Terrorism Strategy a high-level counter-terrorism meeting must be held once per Presidency between the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament. Such meetings were held under the Austrian and German Presidencies. The role of the national parliaments will be strengthened under the new Treaty currently under discussion within the Intergovernmental Conference. The major priority is the implementation of measures already in existence. The Council employs various mechanisms for assessment, such as the EU's peer evaluation process for national counter-terrorism measures, assessment of the implementation of the European Arrest Warrant, assessment of information exchange between Europol and the Member States and between Member States, etc.

New measures are already being analysed, such as the European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection or measures concerning the bio-preparation technology programme, etc. The Council has organised the assessment of information exchange between Europol and the Member States and between Member States. The Secretary-General, Javier Solana, is considering how the function could best be fulfilled within the Secretariat General. The mandate and brief of the possible new coordinator are also under consideration.

Like all the Institutions, the Council is committed to the provision contained in Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union which states that the Union is based on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. The promotion of those values is one of the EU's priorities. The Member States' commitment to respect fundamental rights is also enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Moreover, the Member States of the European Union, as members of the Council of Europe, are bound by the obligations arising from the European Convention on Human Rights.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights strengthens the EU's capacity to monitor and collect information, thus promoting maximum respect for fundamental rights. EU Member States must ensure that the measures they adopt to combat terrorism are consistent with their obligations under international law, especially international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law.

The Presidency considers that the fight against terrorism should be conducted in a manner which respects human rights given that the rule of law, good governance and the protection of fundamental freedoms are tools in the fight against terrorism. That principle is central to the Counter-Terrorism Strategy adopted by the Council, as you know, in December 2005.

Turning now to the Judgment of the Court of First Instance of the European Communities of 12 December 2006 to which the question refers. First I should like to mention that the Judgment in Case T-228/02 of 12 December 2006, known as the *OMPI Case* (*Organisation des Modjahedines du Peuple d'Iran v Council of the European Union*), does not justify the conclusion that the EU practice of terrorist lists is in breach of EU legislation. The Court did not in fact rule against the practice of terrorist lists, but considered merely that some fundamental rights and guarantees, including the right of defence, the obligation to state reasons and the right to effective judicial protection are, in principle, fully applicable in the context of the adoption of a Community decision to freeze funds in accordance with Regulation (EC) No 2580/2001.

Secondly, it is public knowledge that the Council already systematically undertook the necessary revision of its procedures with respect to the list of persons and entities to which Regulation (EC) No 2580/2001 applies. The Council adopted, in particular, the following measures to implement the judgment in Case T-228/02: it called attention to the possibility of contesting the Council decision before the Court of First Instance of the European Communities; it pointed out that it was possible to submit to the Council a request accompanied by supporting documentation for the decision as to inclusion or retention on the list to be examined – such requests are considered as soon as they are received; it provided all the persons, groups and entities for which this was practically possible with statements of reasons – in other cases the persons, groups and entities were informed by way of a notice published in the Official Journal of the European Union; it is carrying out an overall review of the list, at least once every six months, in accordance with the procedures described above, always with due regard to any supplementary information.

The Council also decided to create a new working party – the Working Party on Common Position 931 – which is to deal with requests for inclusions on or exclusions from the list and to prepare for the Council's regular review of the list. The mandate, practical arrangements and the working methods of this new working party are contained in a public document adopted by the Council. All those on the list to which Regulation (EC) No 2580/2001 applies are treated in the same way, as may be seen from the previous answer. The role and competences of the institutions are laid down in the Treaties. The Council takes the necessary measures required to implement the judgments of the Court of Justice in accordance with the provisions of Article 233 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. As regards Parliamentary control over its decisions, the Council always follows the procedures laid down in the Treaties.

It is important to mention that the European Parliament, in accordance with Article 308 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, was consulted when Regulation (EC) No 2580/2001 was adopted. Thank you very much for your attention.

(Applause)

Franco Frattini, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission continues to be fully committed to the implementation of the EU counter-terrorism strategy, the action plan, as the Council just said, endorsed in 2005. Our political goal remains to strike the right balance between the fundamental right to security of citizens, which is, first of all, the right to life, and the other fundamental rights of individuals, including privacy and procedural rights. All sources indicate that the threat of new terrorist attacks continues to be high. Our Member States' authorities have been able to prevent a number of attacks, for which we must be very grateful. I am talking about Spain, Italy, Belgium, the UK and Germany. Yesterday the Danish authorities dismantled a group of young terrorists, also of Danish nationality, ready to mount a bombing attack. Minister Espersen said it was the most serious terrorist case in Denmark.

This morning, we learn that suspected terrorists have been arrested in Frankfurt, and the German Minister of Defence said an attack was imminent.

Do you believe that in all these cases no results have been achieved? Do you not believe that stopping the final stage of a terrorist attack is not in itself a fantastic result for Europe? My answer is – yes, it is.

(Applause)

So there is no room for complacency or letting our guard down. I would first of all like to take this very good opportunity to inform you of a package of measures which are in preparation by my services, and which will be adopted by the Commission this autumn in very close cooperation with the Portuguese Presidency. We are working on prevention and prosecution. This package will consist of a European action plan on the security of explosives, a proposal for an amendment of the Framework Decision on terrorism to deal with terrorist misuse of internet, and a proposal on European passenger name record (PNR) policy. In addition,

the package will contain a report on evaluation of the implementation by the Member States of the Framework Decision on terrorism.

A few words on each of these elements:

The European action plan on explosives is a follow-up to the 2005 Commission communication on this topic, and aims to respond to repeated calls from the European Council and the Council of Ministers of the Interior to improve the explosives situation in Europe.

You will no doubt recall that the attacks in Madrid were committed using commercially available explosives and detonators, which prompted the call for EU action in this area. I am glad that I can report to you that a lot of good work has been done by our services together with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of the private sector. I have received what I think will prove to be a ground-breaking report from a public-private expert group that I have established, which contains around 50 valuable concrete recommendations to improve security of explosives, precursors and detonators across the EU. These recommendations will form the basis for the European action plan which should be adopted, as I said, before November.

The measures that will be proposed in it include, for example, the setting-up of a European explosives database at Europol with links to all the responsible services in Member States, in addition to an early warning system so that these services are informed very quickly, for example, when explosives have been stolen or a new terrorist modus operandi is discovered from credible intelligence information.

This brings me to the internet and the way this tool, which has brought amazing advantages to our world, is being misused by terrorists. We all know that terrorists enjoy the benefits of the internet just as much as ordinary citizens, for instance to plan their attacks or to disseminate messages of concrete incitement to commit terrorist attacks.

The benefits of e-learning have also not escaped the attention of terrorists. You can find on internet websites, for example, detailed information and instructions of all kinds of terrorist tactics, including the production of explosives. The proposal I mentioned just now will aim at ensuring that these forms of negative and criminal behaviour will be made punishable across the EU.

Another element of this package of measures relates to the idea of having a European policy on PNR. Reflection on details of this proposal is still ongoing, but the Commission's main intention is to ensure that each Member State collects PNR records, processes them and, where appropriate, exchanges them with others. Up until now, PNR has been associated mostly with negotiation aimed at ensuring that European citizen data are processed correctly by our partners and allies, in particular the United States.

I think the time has come to partially change focus and devote resources to the security of the European Union. The Union is at least as much a potential target of a terrorist attack as the United States and the use and analysis of PNR is an important law enforcement tool to protect our citizens, who deserve the same protection as the citizens of the United States.

The final element of the package consists of the second report on the implementation of the Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism. The new report will also include information on the situation in the new Member States, which was not available in 2004 – and you can understand why.

This brings me to the more general question raised concerning an overall comprehensive evaluation of all counter-terrorist measures adopted until now. Of course, I am in favour of the principle of evaluating the effectiveness of policies. As regards justice, freedom and security policies in particular you might be aware that work is ongoing on the development of global evaluation mechanisms. I am ready to cooperate, as I have been doing in the past with Parliament, and in particular with the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, to carry out the evaluation of the existing measures, including the international and European agreements with our international partners. But let me make it clear that my aim is to strengthen, not to weaken, our ability to prevent and prosecute terrorism in a more effective way.

As regards the exchange of information between Member States and European institutions, I fully agree that this is an essential aspect of the fight against terrorism. As you know, I have been active in this area. Over the past years, I have put forward a number of proposals on data protection in the third pillar, on the principle of availability and on data retention of electronic communications. Unfortunately, except for data retention, it has not yet been possible to reach agreement on these proposals in the Council, particularly on data protection in the third pillar. But I will continue to strive for their adoption and with the Portuguese proposal

we have an agreement in principle to try to get a final adoption of the framework decision on data protection in the third pillar by December.

It is very often said that mutual trust is needed for effective cooperation, especially when combating terrorism. My view is that trust can be stimulated by us mainly in two ways. First, through ensuring that there is a clear and proper legal framework in place that provides confidence that information supplied will be treated in an appropriate manner and, secondly, through stimulating as many shared international experiences as possible, including joint training exercises so that people working in the field get to know and appreciate each other.

Concerning the Situation Centre ('SitCen'), I should mention that it has certainly provided the Council with a valuable strategic analysis of the terrorist threat, and I have established, thanks to cooperation with Mr Solana, a very good practical cooperation on this. Nevertheless, I do not see a role for SitCen in the area of operational cooperation, certainly not as a coordinating tool for investigations, since its mandate is limited to dealing with non-personal information. This is rather a task for Europol and Eurojust. I believe these are organisations that should be better equipped to deal with such tasks.

We should not forget that the large majority of our citizens – 84% in the latest Eurobarometer – are strongly in favour of EU action to combat terrorists and organised crime. So, let us strengthen Europol and Eurojust based on that.

Naturally, any action we take must be in line with the fundamental rights acquis and with Article 6 of the Treaty. I intend to submit to the Member States a questionnaire on anti-terrorist measures they have adopted, on their effectiveness and on how these relate to the human rights framework. I am ready to share with you data and results of this exercise.

In conclusion, I believe that our counter-terrorist efforts clearly require joint action and the total dedication of the Council, Parliament and the Commission. I am ready to respond once again positively to further possible invitations from this Parliament and from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, as I have been doing since my appointment at the Commission.

(Applause)

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

Manfred Weber, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, speaking earlier, Mr Catania said that the European public was afraid that the rule of law was disintegrating. The European public reads in today's newspapers of the arrest of terrorists in Denmark who had made definite plans for attacks. The German public awoke today to the news that three terrorists had been planning an attack on Frankfurt am Main airport. The public is afraid. It is worried. Terrorism in Europe has caused deaths and a great deal of suffering. The public expects to be safe. Tackling this is our task as European politicians.

What is the European response? Hearing the President-in-Office of the Council today, I realised that stagnation and paralysis have taken hold here. I am disappointed. As we know, terrorism is networked across Europe. The cells cooperate by means of the Internet and using various methods. The Ministers of the Interior are doing their own thing at national level and believing that they have things under control.

I, too, am in favour of an evaluation and of our now putting to the test the measures we have implemented, but we also need new momentum. Terrorism has not been defeated. We need a fresh start. That is why the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats supports the Commission's initiatives.

Terrorism is directed at our way of life, and therefore I should like to emphasise that combating it is a cultural challenge. For example, Europe stands for gender equality, so we want no forced marriages in Europe. Anyone forcing young girls into marriage must be punished. Europe stands for tolerance, and so we want no preachers of hate, with their condemnation of other religions. I am in favour of expelling such people from Europe. I would say to all preachers: no god approves of murder.

I would ask that today's debate be used to give backing to the Council and, in particular, to our Commission, which has put forward good proposals, so as to generate new momentum.

Jan Marinus Wiersma, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, I believe it is important to hold this debate today. It is also important for Parliament to ask questions about progress in the cooperation between Member States in a high-priority area, the fight against terrorism. There are some doubts about whether that cooperation is always satisfactory, and whether the Council's response to the threat that has been described many times today is always adequate. A lack of urgency has become apparent with regard to the Council's progress on a number of points. Also important in this regard is the issue of the successor to Gijs de Vries in the post of Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, which has lain vacant for some months now. The question also remains as to what has happened to the Council's response to the Fava report, Parliament's comprehensive report on the CIA and certain practices that have been used in the fight against terrorism. Cooperation is not always as it should be, in spite of – I must reiterate this – the tremendous commitment of Commissioner Frattini, who has just given a further demonstration of his vigorous approach. Naturally, however, what he wants and is able to do is ultimately determined to some extent by what the Council makes possible.

Today I should like to call attention to one important aspect in particular, one alluded to by both the Commissioner and the President-in-Office, and that is radicalisation and recruitment. We must seek the best way to combat radicalisation – be it religiously motivated or of right-wing extremist origin – at European level, too, in the form of cooperation between Member States. It is important in this regard to find ways of reaching out to young people who are susceptible to this kind of radicalisation. That is one of the priorities of the Council and the Commission, and Parliament, too, will be discussing the subject further in the near future.

We must try to discover the motives of the young people who, as a result of radicalisation, are sometimes enticed to engage in terrorist activities. These motives include dissatisfaction with their own situation, discontent with what is happening in international politics or with the polarisation of their own society, a need for meaning, and frustration with world politics. Poverty can also be a motive. We must examine all these motives if we wish to achieve an effective approach. The motives of young people in Morocco who have carried out attacks are often completely different from the motives of those who have done so in the Netherlands, for example the man who murdered Theo van Gogh. We must join together to seek arguments capable of combating radicalisation, and improve circumstances so that young people are not so readily susceptible to incitement to radicalisation and violence.

Keeping numbers of radicalised young people down is an initial challenge. An appropriate policy here is one of repression: tackling those who incite others to violence, tackling virtual Internet networks that incite young people to extreme behaviour, and also containing groups via a preventive policy. This begins at local level, but can also be translated to national and European level. I should like to draw attention in this regard to the new initiatives announced by the Dutch Government, for which a substantial amount of money has also been earmarked. This is to be used at local level, in the neighbourhoods, to find an approach to identifying young people who may be susceptible to radicalisation and everything that can result from this.

I should like to recommend that the Commission focuses on the experience of the Netherlands, on how this can be exchanged with other Member States. It may also be possible to use the Commission's Integration Fund to promote some of these activities, to bring the added value of a European approach to bear in this field, too. I should like to ask the Commissioner once more whether he, too, can envisage any possibilities for exchanging Dutch practice with other Member States who are facing the same problems, particularly in large towns and cities.

Graham Watson, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, if we go back just over 2 000 years, we will recall that in the autumn of 68 bc the world's only superpower suffered a terrorist attack by a band of loosely organised pirates, and in panic the Roman Senate granted Pompey, at least according to Plutarch, 'absolute authority and uncontrolled power over everyone' through the *Lex Gabinia*. By the oldest trick in the book, the military subverted liberty, democracy and the constitution with the assent of Rome's frightened citizens, and it took 1 800 years for mature democracy to resurface in Europe.

Now, once again, laws that take away our freedoms risk entering by the back door. I welcome the oral questions that colleagues have tabled today, with their very specific questions to Council and Commission.

I do not argue that counter-terrorism laws are unnecessary. The arrest yesterday of three people in Germany and the arrest this morning of another three in Denmark show the continuing threat that terrorists pose to our society. My Group is united in its belief that we need more judicial cooperation to make Europol and Eurojust as effective as possible.

We backed the European Arrest Warrant to the hilt, trusting the Council to put minimum procedural guarantees in place. We would support a European FBI. Liberals and Democrats are not soft on crime. Indeed, we are astonished at the failure of Europe's right-wing-dominated Council to find a coherent approach to a matter of law and order. What we are saying, however, is that laws must be proportionate to threats.

And indeed, if the threat is so great, why has the Council not moved to replace its anti-terrorism coordinator since the last one left in March?

Mr President-in-Office, you have told us that you are 'reflecting on the best way of ensuring cooperation'. Well, the terrorists have had six months while you have been reflecting. You tell us that 'the United States has the leading role in counter-terrorism'. We want the European Union to set its own policy. You tell us that the European Parliament has, and I quote, 'a primordial role', but that primordial role turns out to be a courtesy meeting once every six months with the chairman of our committee.

I welcome Commissioner Frattini's agreement today to evaluate with Parliament the effectiveness of European Union policy, and I hope the Council Presidency will come along with him for that debate.

Since 9/11, we have had a counter-terrorism strategy, an action plan, a framework decision and several cooperation initiatives. None of these has been thoroughly and openly evaluated, let alone by Europe's democratic institutions. The Council and the Commission should involve Parliament in a comprehensive review of all the measures adopted thus far.

Here in Parliament, we should be insisting on sunset clauses for anti-terror laws so that legislation susceptible to abuse does not remain on the statute books any longer than necessary.

We are now on to the third and final PNR agreement, for example, an agreement which in perpetuity gives up certain rights for uncertain benefits. My Group questions whether security really demands that the United States Government knows our dietary preferences.

Commissioner Frattini, you tell us that 85% of citizens are strongly in favour of European action. Mr Lobo Antunes, you tell us that the Presidency has no doubt that its measures are supported by citizens. Have the two of you not passed through an airport this summer? Have you not heard the young women asking why their lipstick has to be confiscated before they board an aeroplane? Have you not heard the old ladies cry out in frustration when their toenail scissors are taken away? Have you not listened to the people infuriated at how anti-terror laws are being exploited for commercial gain? My local airport now charges people 50 pence for a plastic bag into which travellers have to put their toothpaste. Constituents have written to me about how much is being charged for bottled water air-side of the security controls.

The *Lex Gabinia* was a classic illustration of the law of unintended consequences because it fatally subverted the institutions it was supposed to protect. I hope that Europe's anti-terror laws will not end up doing the same.

Karl Popper once said, 'We must plan for freedom, and not only for security, if for no other reason than only freedom can make security secure'.

(Applause)

Konrad Szymański, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, in the wake of the tragic experiences of New York, Madrid and London, our ability to cooperate in counter-terrorism matters has grown, in both EU and transatlantic contexts. We should take further steps in this direction.

Our concern for privacy and citizens' rights should not be used to justify the blocking of effective action. There is an unavoidable price to pay for safety in this area. What our citizens are looking for above all is safety.

Changes to international law are also needed. Modern terrorism has given rise to a hitherto unknown phenomenon – that of the stateless soldier. His statelessness makes it difficult to apply the Geneva Conventions. At the same time we must agree that it makes no sense to afford terrorists the procedural rights characteristic of the European penal process, and that it deprives us of effectiveness in combating this phenomenon.

Cem Özdemir, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, today we received news of the arrest of suspected terrorists in Denmark and Germany that has been mentioned many times. This demonstrates that the problem in question is not theoretical, but real. This being the case, the motto 'the more, the better'

cannot be the order of the day; instead, we need targeted measures that are coordinated throughout Europe and, above all, prove to be worthwhile in practice and to indeed be helpful.

This brings me to my first point, namely the urgent need for an overview of the measures that have been taken to date by the nation states. I welcome the Commissioner's announcement that a questionnaire is to be drawn up. We need this evaluation, precisely because we wish to convince our citizens of the necessity of counter-terrorism measures. However, to do so, we must prove that they are indeed effective.

After all, we wish to know what has been achieved to date in the fight against terrorism. In this connection, we are also interested in the regrettable refusal to take a position on the illegal kidnappings in Europe by the CIA thus far. We need answers on this score, too. I should like to make one thing clear: secret prisons and extraditions to third countries where torture is carried out are also connected with the fight against terrorism, namely its moral dimension. The moral dimension of the fight against terrorism must not be neglected, as we must prevail there, too, if we want to succeed.

Some speakers have mentioned the importance of involving the European Parliament in this debate. I believe that the Council Presidency needs to understand that the involvement of freely elected people's representatives is indispensable for the purposes of acceptance. I should like the Council Presidency to strengthen this aspect of the discussion. As the President-in-Office knows, the European Court of Justice has decided repeatedly that the EU list of terrorist organisations infringes both Community and international law. I welcome his comments on this issue today. I am also interested to hear, however, whether the annual evaluations of which he spoke are to be made available to Parliament and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. After all, we need these for our work, to enable us to really assess what happens with this 'terror list', the extent to which the rule of law and parliamentary control are ensured, and to what extent it can be guaranteed that those appearing wrongfully on this list will be removed from it as soon as possible.

The issue of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator has already been raised. We want to know the future plans for this post. My group is not against such European coordination in principle. It makes sense in theory to consolidate competences in this field, to endeavour to bring together the experiences gathered at national level. We are also interested to hear, however, what the Council Presidency has to say about the work done to date by the counter-terrorism unit at European level. What kind of experiences have there been with it? Hence my question to the President-in-Office: what lessons have you learned from the work done to date by Mr de Vries?

Tobias Pflüger, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Mr President, in my opinion, this debate is fairly fundamental to democracy in the European Union. It is good to take a look back. Since 12 September 2001, a 'war' has been waged on terrorism. On that day, NATO invoked the mutual defence clause, having wrongly judged the attacks in New York and Washington to be military attacks. How this mutual defence clause can be revoked is anyone's guess. Now the 'war on terror' is being waged worldwide, for example in Afghanistan, where Iraqisation is increasing progressively, whilst at domestic level more and more fundamental and civil rights are being invalidated. The whole situation could be described as a permanent state of emergency.

The EU has adopted a framework decision on combating terrorism. This sets out a large number of points being implemented or to be implemented by the EU Member States and the EU itself.

We are currently seeing widespread 'actionism', especially by the German Minister of the Interior, Wolfgang Schäuble, who is now describing everything as terrorism and is clearly overstepping the bounds of what is actually necessary.

After London, the author A.L. Kennedy made a very interesting comment, which I should like to quote here: 'Nobody mentions that the number of victims, as horrendous as it was, would be considered only moderate in Baghdad on most days. Nobody says that, in deciding to send our soldiers to war for profit, Tony Blair also put his country in danger [...] Nobody mentions that our actions have only increased the number and the intensity of terrorist acts. Nobody notes that even we have justified the torturing of prisoners by saying that attacks could be prevented by this means. Nobody mentions that, for vast parts of the world, we are the terrorists.' That is exactly what must be avoided, which is why the invalidation of fundamental and civil rights cannot continue.

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (NL) Mr President, I should like to start by thanking the President-in-Office of the Council and the Vice-President of the European Commission sincerely for their detailed replies to our questions. I am pleased that this debate gives us the opportunity to look back in order to move forward again. At the forefront of this debate is the question of what measures have been taken to

combat terrorism and whether these have been effective. More important still is the question of whether the measures conflict with the democratic rule of law.

Today, we are to vote on amending the rules on hand luggage in air transport. Mr Watson has already spoken about this. This vote – I hope – will put an end to a controversial measure. The rules on liquids are ineffective and arouse great opposition. We must ensure that the fight against terrorism does not become a policy of delusion. An enormous amount of information has been gathered since the 2001 attacks – yet data collection must lead to data processing. After the attacks in London and Madrid it emerged that the intelligence services did indeed have data at their disposal but did not act in time. The data may be available, but application remains a problem.

Recently, a book was published in the Netherlands about terrorism and those combating it. This argues from a historical perspective that the effectiveness of terrorism is limited. The fight against terrorism, on the other hand, sometimes has a major impact on society, resulting in irritation. Those combating terrorism lose their moral credit balance with citizens in the course of this battle – which is a gain for the terrorists. When we take new measures, therefore, we must strike the right balance between the rule of law and an effective fight against terrorism. Monitoring is a legitimate parliamentary instrument in this regard.

The former Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Gijs de Vries, said that in his experience not one Member State wanted a European police force or a European security service. Member States want security to continue to be organised at national level. Yet we are still trying to organise European cooperation. One problem that follows from this is the lack of democratic control of such cooperation. National parliaments monitor their own services, but not this cooperation. What does the Council think about informing the European Parliament consistently and regularly? By this I do not mean primarily presenting new measures for approval, but answering the questions that have now been raised so often. As is the case with the national parliamentary security committees, such meetings should be allowed to take place behind closed doors. I should like to hear whether the Council wishes to cooperate on this.

Andreas Mölzer, *on behalf of the ITS Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the latest reports from Denmark and Frankfurt am Main in Germany are proof that the threat of Islamist terrorism has not gone away. Yet the most recent studies demonstrate that this threat comes less from outside – that is, from Al-Qaida – than from young Muslims living in the European Union itself who are susceptible to radicalisation and subsequently turn into terrorists.

Terrorists do not just appear out of the blue, therefore; potential perpetrators grow up in our Islamist parallel societies, with madrasahs and preachers of hate, in particular, playing a major, a disastrous, role. Thanks to political correctness, the indigenous peoples of Europe are all too easily labelled right-wing extremist or even racist for insisting on their basic culture, whilst migrants seldom face this problem. The Islamist parallel societies now existing throughout Europe are often underestimated.

Terrorism often has its roots in schools. It then continues in juvenile gangs and, following this radicalisation, may then culminate in attacks. We must close the gaps in our society in which terrorism can thrive, gaps that have arisen from misplaced tolerance. We must draw boundaries; there is certainly no need for us to tolerate everything. Changing our traditional lifestyles and denying our own culture provides the best breeding ground for terrorism. It is high time, therefore, that Brussels, too, accepted that the multicultural vision is in tatters and supported Europe's indigenous population again at long last, instead of constantly discrediting it under the pretext of stamping out racism.

Jim Allister (NI). – Mr President, there are essentially two points I would like to make in this important debate. First, all or most of us can come to this House and deplore and denounce terrorism, as well we might, because it is vile and indefensible in all its forms. But within the EU do we always consistently practise what we preach?

Events at Frankfurt and in Denmark are a reminder of the ever-present threat of terrorism. If any government minister anywhere in the EU were to condemn those arrests this morning or later to resist connected necessary extraditions, we would all be outraged because terrorism is terrorism and is not sanitised by the passage of time.

Yet in my small country just weeks ago we had the Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, who knows more than most about the hideous practice of terrorism, reverting to form and vehemently attacking the German Government's current application, under a European arrest warrant, for the extradition of an Irish

Republican suspect for a bombing many years ago in Germany. Such behaviour is intolerable. Just as was the harbouring by Ireland of three IRA terrorists convicted in Colombia.

So I say it behoves us all in Europe to lead by example. We cannot pick and choose in attacking and resisting terrorism. If we are against it, we must be against it all and act accordingly. If you genuinely support the rule of law, then you do not attack and protest against the means of securing international justice.

My second point is that the recourse of ETA to active terrorism is a timely reminder that seldom does the terrorist leopard change its spots. Those who stoop to terrorism have an amoral mindset, capable of switching for tactical reasons to supposed commitment to political means if, for the time being, it better serves their purposes.

We should all be wary of such and never make the mistake of judging terrorists by our own standards.

Jaime Mayor Oreja (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to start by saying that the fight is not against the phenomenon of terrorism. In each case the fight is against a particular organisation that has a particular political agenda and specific political objectives.

We therefore need to start by naming the terrorist organisation that we are faced with, and at the moment, the fundamental future risk facing the European Union is a jihadist terrorist organisation, which is not a phenomenon but rather an organisation that has already overcome the fear of carrying out attacks on our continent.

The difference between this organisation and other traditional organisations that have struck at and are striking at the European Union, is that it is still very much an unknown quantity, because we do not understand the rhythm of attacks or the reason behind the choice of countries, and because their sense of timing is significantly different from ours.

Because of this, as Mr Watson expressed so well, the task of the EU's institutions is not to produce an exhaustive list of measures, but rather it is time to establish the foundations, the pillars and even the fields of operation for the European institutions to play a role in the fight against terrorism.

We need to seek direction. In this area it is not about announcing more and more measures. We have to understand that the role of the EU's institutions should be establishing what we fundamentally need in order to fight this organisation, which is intelligence and information.

Therefore, first and foremost we need a European model for fighting this terrorist organisation, because otherwise, in the Europe of 2025, if the European Union does not add value, if it is no good and is neither useful nor recognised as serving Europeans in this fight against terrorism, they will wonder what the point of the European Union is.

Bárbara Dührkop Dührkop (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, I do think that it has been repeated *ad nauseam* that the phenomenon of terrorism — which is, of course, clearly recognisable groups — is not only a European issue, it is a global issue, as the Council said, and there is no doubt that we need global and European responses.

I believe, and in view of what Mr Frattini said about what happened this morning in Frankfurt, which I also heard about, that it is perhaps the most important challenge facing the EU, because it not only affects the security of citizens and their physical integrity, but it also seeks to undermine something very important: it seeks to undermine the values of democratic societies. This is why it is so important for the European Union to seek joint responses.

I believe that this oral question to Parliament shows how much Parliament wants to make progress in the fight against terrorism, but it also shows that we have concerns, because Mr Watson presented a number of issues that may be aberrations, in the context of the measures that we are taking, because above all, in this fight we also have a responsibility to democracy and freedom, which is very important and cannot be forgotten.

I would also like to say that I think the measures are necessary, like everything that we have done, and everything that Mr Frattini says is going to happen, and that the work done by the police is also very significant, but not sufficient. In my view we also need to strengthen policies that create integration and dialogue between different cultures. I think that the alliance of civilisations is a valid instrument in the fight against terrorism.

We need to continue with what we discussed in Tampere and the work that we then did in The Hague in order to consolidate what we said: the balance between freedom, security and justice.

This is why the European Parliament hastened to adopt the Prüm Treaty before the summer. This possibility of quickly and efficiently exchanging accurate information is of vital importance for achieving international cooperation against terror.

It is true that we are saying that we need to reconcile these rights of citizens and human beings with guaranteeing security. The European Parliament has a decisive role, but, as the Council says, nowadays Parliament does not effectively have a say on what is done in this field.

Either the Council takes a unanimous decision or it takes no decision. This is why I think that this weakens and curbs the European Union's power to respond to new challenges. As Mr Watson said so clearly, the only opportunity the European Parliament has to work with the Council is a courtesy meeting, and as a democratically elected assembly we should have the opportunity to take part in decisions.

We welcome the creation of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights, and we hope that this agency will be able to fairly monitor all the EU's activities in the field of police and judicial cooperation.

I would also like to point out that our Group supports the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, whoever it may be, but it should be soon. What is important is that he or she should not be a paper tiger, but have a clear and strong mandate.

Finally, and I will end here, I think that it is right to say that the European Union's action in the fight against terrorism and its consequences should include an essential dimension: support and protection for victims and their families.

Sarah Ludford (ALDE). – Mr President, coming from London I in no way minimise the terrorist threat. Indeed, we Londoners have endured it for decades, including when it was Irish Republican terrorism part-funded from the United States. The moral high ground is a precarious location.

Europol tells us that there were almost 500 terrorist attacks in the EU last year. Of course it is a major criminal threat, but so are drug smuggling, people trafficking and corruption. Where is the Council action to insist that all Member States sign and ratify the European Convention on Human Trafficking? Where was the Council protest when the UK Government terminated a major corruption probe in January against 'national champion' arms manufacturer BAE?

Just because Liberals question the effectiveness of the liquids ban compared to its inconvenience, or challenge the mass collection of personal data, does not mean that we are soft on terrorism. No area of policy should escape democratic accountability.

I was proud to be Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's Enquiry on Extraordinary Rendition and I share the outrage others have expressed on the complete silence of the Council in the face of our findings that many Member States were complicit in massive human rights abuses, of abduction and torture.

The Council would do well to look in its own backyard before it gobbles up the civil liberties of EU citizens. MEPs have had no information on the implementation of the Framework Decision on Terrorism passed over five years ago. Has every Member State fully transposed it? How many cases have there been? How many investigations or convictions have been recorded? We know that agencies, even within one state, will not share information because of jealousies, power struggles and turf wars, let alone through cross-border cooperation. Why not make that a priority instead of frenetically legislating to take away our privacy all the time?

There is also a lot of inconsistency when it comes to tackling radicalism. This is an important subject, but it also implies the integration of the vast majority of moderate Muslims, and yet there are parts of the EU where great difficulties are placed in the way of the building of mosques. Why not look at that?

Mr Szymański expressed an extreme right-wing view that we cannot pay too high a price for security. I could not disagree with that more fundamentally. Is it not what the Communists said to justify their repression? Instead of trading too much liberty for security, let us look at what really works: targeted investigations and intelligence-led policing. That is the way to keep public confidence and cooperation.

Mario Borghezio (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on 11 September in Brussels many democratic movements with a Catholic and Christian basis organised a major demonstration against Islamic terrorism and in memory of the victims of 11 September, but the socialist Mayor of Brussels banned it on contemptible grounds related to internal politics.

This sends negative signals on terrorism, but more serious still is the wooing of Hamas terrorists by a premier, Romano Prodi, and a foreign affairs minister, Mr D'Alema. The political signals sent by Europe should instead be united against Islamic terrorism and we should jointly oppose those who preach in the mosques against us and our security.

I welcome the Commissioner's statement that European citizens must be more protected and feel more protected, at least as much as US citizens, and that it is therefore necessary to strengthen transatlantic relations. I ask you though, Mr Frattini, on the imminent danger of terrorist acts waged using bacteriological weapons, for example – God forbid – or by nuclear means: are we prepared? Southern Europe proved to be unprepared for the threat of fires, but now it seems to me that we need to do more – much more. I wish you every success in your work, Mr Frattini.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllidis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, let me begin by pointing out that the efforts of recent years to make terrorism a key project and priority for the European Union have turned out to be a non-starter.

The US secret services will be able to monitor everyone's telephone calls, Internet activity and emails on all servers based in the United States without restriction. This development is yet another attempt at universal control and the policing of citizens on a worldwide basis, and the EU has unfortunately acquiesced by adopting measures that have proved to be a hindrance to its own development. A large part of the EU budget is allocated to establishing and strengthening police agencies, military operations, the creation of immigrant detention facilities, etc.

I particularly wish to mention the compilation of lists of terrorists. These lists are not subject to any democratic or institutional legislative control, or to any procedure of judicial audit or review of appeals. Even after the decisions of the European Court on 12 December 2006, when it returned a judgment of deficient controls and failure to comply with the necessary measures to protect human rights, the European Union made only superficial changes.

The fundamental problems remain. The Member States are not compelled to submit evidence concerning the individuals they propose to include on the list, while, more dangerously still, the Commission itself remains responsible for adding and removing the names of individuals and organisations on that list. In other words, Mr President, the Commission remains judge, jury and executioner.

Koenraad Dillen (ITS). – (NL) Mr President, I note to my regret that a great many people in this Hemicycle are once more shying away from calling a spade a spade. Whether we like it or not, the uncomfortable reality is that international terrorism is purely and simply a war that has been declared on the West and on Europe by Islamic extremists. We must have the courage to recognise that the enemy is already within our walls. Jihad networks are operating throughout Europe, and mosques are calling the faithful to a holy war against our open society. Yesterday we received a further illustration of this in Denmark. Therefore, the need for comprehensive measures against this Islamic Trojan Horse has never been greater. After all, we have the right and the duty to defend the values of our open society.

But are we doing so? As my fellow Member Mr Borghezio has just said, a typical expression of European cowardice is the decision by Freddy Thielemans, the socialist Mayor of Brussels, to ban a march against the increasing Islamisation of Europe planned for Tuesday 11 September, on grounds that the demonstration could be seen as a snub to the ever-growing, electorally interesting Islamic community. Europe seeks to propagate the values of an open society, chiefly freedom of expression, all round the world whilst gagging advocates of the same European values in its own official capital. It says a good deal about this Parliament that no clear position is being taken on this.

Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE). – Mr President, this debate is about the safety of our people and the preservation of our way of life, our liberal democracy, the rule of law and the defence of freedom.

Terrorism strikes at the very heart of all of these things. In all its forms, terrorism defines the fight between good and evil, and we must remain ever vigilant. In Britain we had the IRA to deal with for three decades. More recently, we have had the London suicide bombings and the attempts to cause carnage in Glasgow.

My colleagues from Spain battle with the evil campaign of terror waged by ETA. They have our complete support in their courageous response. Tackling radicalisation is a major challenge, but we live in a world where the terror threat is constantly changing and becoming more sophisticated. The democracies of the

world must remain vigilant, must share intelligence more effectively and must be prepared to take tough action.

Terrorism is an act of war on the fabric of our society. It is perpetrated by criminals and murderers who detest our liberal democracy and freedom. Terrorist groups must be banned, and those who perpetrate violence, incite terrorism or give succour to terrorists should be tackled. In terms of the action that EU Member States can take together, we saw at the weekend the arrest of ETA bomb-makers. This shows that joint investigation teams add value to the anti-terrorism fight.

Today we vote on the restriction of liquids on aircraft. The security of the travelling public must be our prime concern – the concern of ourselves, of governments, airport operators and airlines. But, as with all legislation, improvements can be brought about in the light of experience and I believe there is a case – and a good one – for a review of how that is operating.

At the same time we should rely fundamentally on available intelligence to assist legislators like ourselves in determining the nature and extent of the ongoing threat. I commend Commissioner Frattini's proposals, which are positive in that respect.

There is, I appreciate, a delicate balance, but in any event we must always do what we can to protect our people from the evil and murderous intent of terrorism.

Claudio Fava (PSE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that this debate is enabling us, in the meantime, to overcome, to take stock, but also to overcome some dangerous mistakes – a first mistake. We are debating a strategy against terrorism, not against Islam, and reducing the causes of terrorism in a simplistic way to Islamic fundamentalism would be a rather superficial solution, a rather simplistic reading. Similarly, some turns of phrase that I have just heard worry me: the mosques bring war into our societies! These are rather general, rather violent, and rather boorish opinions. Imagine if in Turkey tomorrow an MP stood up in the Turkish Parliament and said 'the Christian churches bring war into our society' – what would be the indignant reaction of this Parliament?

I would also like to make a suggestion to Mr Frattini: we know that enforcement work is absolutely fundamental, just as much as preventive work. I believe, however, that calculations ought to be made on the basis not of alleged terrorists arrested but on actual terrorists found guilty. It would be useful to monitor or do some reconnaissance work on how many terrorist suspects have been arrested over recent years in our countries and have subsequently been released.

We have received some replies from the Council, but some of these have been partial answers. I would like to focus on three points here that we need to explore more deeply: it is not very clear to us what the role of this Parliament ought to be, and how it is to be truly associated with this European Union strategy. We do not believe – and this has been pointed out by other Members – that a meeting once every six months between the Vice-President and the Chairman of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Council is sufficient. We believe that a quality and level of consensus is required that cannot be limited to these formal, ritualistic meetings.

It is not clear to us what will happen regarding the functions of the EU counter-terrorism coordinator. It has been explained to us that this function is primarily linked to providing strategic assessments and disseminating information. When our committee had the opportunity of talking with Mr de Vries, it was admitted to us that the function was completely devoid of content or tools. In that case, I believe that nothing can be more damaging than an institutional function that does not have the tools with which to exist or give an account of itself.

Finally, Mr President, it is not clear what position the Portuguese Presidency will adopt on Euro-Atlantic cooperation. I would like to go back to the very simple and very sincere request contained in our question. The question was whether this cooperation will be pursued with methods complying with Article 6 of the Treaty as recommended by this Parliament at the completion of the CIA enquiry. We need a clear answer. A joint strategy makes sense if it includes full respect for the fundamental rights of citizens, but this has not always been the case.

We welcome the initiative by Vice-President Frattini on a questionnaire to be distributed to the EU Member States to find out what instruments they have put in place and what responses have been produced by these instruments, including in the sphere of respect for the fundamental rights of citizens, but on this point we would like to let you know that this Parliament intends nonetheless to instigate a follow-up to the conclusions

of the committee of enquiry on the CIA and to put the formal question: what action have the Council and the Commission taken with regard to the many requests made in those reports?

Mr President, in conclusion, I think I can say that combating terrorism requires a high level of social consensus and we need to be vigilant regarding the principles set out in Article 6 of the Treaty. Avoiding abuses and avoiding simplification is the only way of ensuring we achieve this consensus.

Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, democracy, civil rights and the rule of law are things I hold extremely dear; as are my own life and that of my fellow Europeans. Talking of a trade-off between the two is dangerous nonsense. Enemies of democracy must be resisted; by this I mean terrorists, but also the threat to democracy that is excessive state power and the exclusion of democratic control. Time and again we hear the Council, and to a lesser degree the Commission, talking about fundamental rights, human rights and democracy, but this rings somewhat hollow when we learn that state control of citizens is growing fast. Every intimate detail of our private lives is now known. On the other hand, however, citizens have less and less control of the state.

What is more, the national authorities and the Council refuse to be accountable. I should like the Council to tell us, for example, the situation with the High-Level Contact Group that is engaged in negotiations with the United States regarding the transfer of our private data. We are always being told that these are exploratory talks, but the United States seems to think that we are already poised to sign an agreement. What is the situation, President-in-Office? What is the negotiators' mandate? What is the subject of the negotiations? This was discussed in Lisbon on 19 and 20 July. Why are the national parliaments and the European Parliament – European citizens – not being informed about this?

Another example is the recent US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. Mr Watson and I have asked questions about this. It is a law enabling the US to monitor almost all of our intra-European communication, telephone calls and emails. Why does the Council say that this has nothing to do with it? Does the Council not have any responsibility to protect the privacy of European citizens?

The third example is PNR. We have discussed this subject a hundred thousand times before. The ink has hardly dried on the agreement and the US has withdrawn its only good component: the application of the Privacy Act to European citizens. The Commission says that a European PNR system is to be introduced, but has there yet been an evaluation of the results of the American PNR programme? I am delighted that the Commissioner says that there is to be an evaluation and that it will cover not only implementation but also the results of the counter-terrorism policy and the impact on fundamental rights, as this is long overdue.

It is interesting that, if you criticise or ask critical questions about the counter-terrorism policy, you often find yourself described as anti-American. Yet it is actually the Americans who are asking the critical questions and who have carried out comprehensive evaluations in recent months and are putting big question marks on the effectiveness of these measures. Therefore, instead of playing copycat and adopting bad US policy, Europe must adopt good policy and join with the US to consider what is necessary and what is not.

Paul Marie Coûteaux (IND/DEM). – (FR) Mr President, obviously I am not against the litanies of fine sentiments, incantations and pious wishes that are dominating this debate, but I cannot really see in them the kind of objectivity I believe is necessary to understand a phenomenon that has so abruptly come to occupy our minds – so abruptly, moreover, that we are not taking the trouble to work out the ins and outs of it, the causes and the consequences. Ladies and gentlemen, what is politics if it is not patiently working out the causes and consequences of what immediately concerns us?

Frightening video surveillance systems are being installed everywhere, in public places and even on the streets. Why? To fight terrorism. We put citizens on file, develop the police services, and sometimes the secret police. Why? To fight terrorism. We bring back torture. Why? To fight terrorism. We change laws and increasingly we flout them, and we even flout people's fundamental rights, the supposed substitute for our Bibles of old. Why? To fight terrorism. We install anti-missile shields everywhere, even in countries such as the Czech Republic, to the great displeasure of its population which has not experienced any terrorism anyway, and all in the name of the fight against terrorism. In short, we divide nations, create mistrust between peoples and most of all, we browbeat them, which is what has happened in our European nations, alas, in east and west alike. Why? To fight terrorism.

Ladies and gentlemen, is it not clear that it is not terrorism that absorbs us, but the fight against terrorism? An insidious veil is clouding our vision, and we cannot even see it. Of course I do not deny the vileness of the attacks in our nations, in Spain and the United Kingdom. However, these examples speak for themselves

in that terrorism affected these countries because they supported an act of war: the invasion of a sovereign state. Moreover, I am not afraid to say that what happened in Iraq was not so much a response to terrorism as another age-old, barbaric form of terrorism that took international tension up a notch.

In truth, terrorism is itself the consequence of a profoundly unbalanced world, dominated by an empire that, like all the world's empires, denies borders and peoples, aiming to create everywhere a one-dimensional, uniform world, obsessively focused on the value of goods alone. A world so stifling and violent for the diversity of different peoples that the only response is another kind of violence, one that is obviously equally unacceptable: terror.

Let us have the courage to really think about this. What if terrorism was primarily a consequence of this new categorical imperative that is imposed by market forces and is part of its logic: the suppression of borders. Not only is the abolition of borders, the fashion for cross-borderism, doing away with the world's diversity and infuriating those who want to keep it, but also the disappearance of borders favours the machinations of gangs. Perhaps this, ladies and gentlemen, is a discussion point that could be added to the debate on the fight against terrorism?

Ryszard Czarnecki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, the reality of ancient Europe was Hannibal *ante portas*. The reality of modern Europe is terrorism *ante portas*, or at the gates. For a year now the European Parliament has been formally engaged in an interinstitutional debate. This is good, particularly as Europe is genuinely continuing to experience terrorist attacks and will certainly experience them in the future. What we are talking about is imposing real limits on the potential for these attacks to be carried out.

It is therefore right that we should want to know which EU Member States have failed to introduce anti-terrorism measures, measures that were established earlier. This must be clear to ensure that individual societies do not wake up in shock immediately after attacks have been carried out in their countries. Likewise, we want to know the real reasons for the resignation of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Mr de Vries. Was this dismissal prompted by disputes over competence?

Terrorism is not an abstraction; it is very real. I am speaking as the representative of a country whose armed forces are engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan. For my country, which has no experience of terrorist attacks, terrorism is nevertheless a challenge.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS MORGANTINI

Vice-President

Miguel Portas (GUE/NGL). – (PT) I have listened carefully to what the Council and Commission have said and I have to say that I feel sure we shall be having this debate again – under exactly the same terms as this one – within the space of a few months because in the eyes of Dr Lobo Antunes and Commissioner Frattini, all that has been done has been done well, was done well; no mistakes were made and any assessment will reveal not a single error. We keep hearing the same thing over and over again and that is the main problem – they are mistaken! As long as we continue to approach terrorism as a problem falling within the scope of the police and information services, we shall be putting off the central issue.

Terrorism nowadays is closely associated with the symmetrical political principles which promote the clash of civilisations and war, and on that point your silence is deafening. For example, Commissioner Frattini is announcing measures for controlling explosives at the very time when the war in Iraq has turned into a private business deal worth millions of dollars and when the United States is outsourcing the collection and processing of classified information.

Control explosives? I know one way: nationalise the manufacture and trade. That is the only way to prevent terrorism and counter-terrorism from turning into two sides of the same coin: turning life and death into a business.

Viorica-Pompilia-Georgeta Moisuc (ITS). – (RO) Madam President, terrorism is a complex phenomenon with a long history, embodied in various forms, from subversive movements aiming at suppressing the sovereignty of states and internal order, triggering civil wars, to attempts, murders and pogroms. This is the reason why this issue should be approached realistically, with responsibility, and specialists from various fields of expertise should take part in the related debates.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks, the tens of thousands victims and the huge damage urge society, the European states and institutions, to take concerted, systematic and permanent action on several axes some of which I would like to remind you of:

1. objectively searching for the causes of this phenomenon and the permanent amelioration thereof.
2. discovering the financing sources for terrorist acts and transnational political and financial networks.
3. determining the relationship between terrorism per se, weapons policy and wars for capturing strategic raw material sources, on the pretence of the fight against terrorism.

Any unilateral approach to the issue of terrorism does not contribute to finding out the truth about it and stamping out this dangerous transnational phenomenon.

Antonio Tajani (PPE-DE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, combating terrorism must remain one of the European Union's main priorities. Certainly we need effective, constant, coordinated measures to prevent and combat terrorism and so the proposals set out in this Chamber by Mr Frattini are welcome.

First of all, we should not make the mistake of lowering our guard when international terrorism strikes far from Europe. Unfortunately, the threat from Islamic fundamentalism has not diminished, even when attacks take place far from our borders.

Coordinated action means, above all, cooperation within the EU, as well as strong links with the United States: cutting our links with the United States in the fight against terrorism would be an extremely serious mistake, and would cause very severe damage to the population of the European Union as a whole, but there should also be links with the moderate Arab countries, including those in Al-Qaida's sights.

Europe must take a leading role in these measures to prevent and combat terrorism, but must ensure that significant action prevails over bureaucratic manoeuvring. Unfortunately, it is easier to put in place strict controls on deodorant bottles that are not transported in the proper plastic bags than on terrorists who have infiltrated as illegal immigrants. Therefore, I repeat, strong action by the European Commission and the Council will be welcome.

The fight against terrorism, however, should also be waged through political initiatives to produce a solution, at last, to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, involving the birth of a Palestinian State and guaranteed security for the Israeli State, without making any concessions to fundamentalist organisations camouflaged as political groups – I am referring to Hamas and Hezbollah.

In the fight against terrorism, though, we should not forget that in Europe, alongside the dangers of the Islamic element, there is a dangerous network of armed groups associated with internal and separatist political movements. Europe – and I am finishing here – must not lower its guard on this front either. The events that took place in Spain show us that any time we lower our guard or choose the route of negotiation, terrorists return to the attack.

Michael Cashman (PSE). – Madam President, I welcome the responses of Commissioner Frattini and the President-in-Office of the Council. However, the reality is that we in this House have the luxury of talk, talk, talk. But actually, in government and in the Commission, you have to take action – action to prevent terrorist attacks: terrorist attacks which are not imagined; terrorist attacks which are real, which are being planned currently. The reality of politics is that if you took no action, the same members of this House who attack you for taking the action, would attack you because you had not acted.

Therefore, I welcome the strategy, and the fact that we will review the strategy. Furthermore, what we have to do, as has been said before, is to tackle the roots of terrorism. They lie in hopelessness and despair, in poverty, in the preaching of hatred. Let me say quite clearly and unequivocally, those who espouse a cause, a tradition or a religion for their terrorist acts undermine their ideology, their religion, their cause and their tradition.

Now, above all, we need to act as 27 Member States – not separately – and act in conjunction with our allies, including the United States. The United States is not a problem. The attacks on the United States did not occur on September 11, they occurred before then, and an attack upon one is arguably an attack upon all of us.

Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE). – Madam President, we all acknowledge the terrorist threat and we must go on reacting to it, without betraying who and what we are. We are a democratic society, ruled by the rule

of law. It is as such, and only as such, that we must react against criminal acts and support the prevention against possible future attacks. However, we are entering a very dangerous path where everything appears to be allowed, under the excuse of prevention. We are subject to the moral blackmail of those who are saying: if you question this measure, you are putting us in danger – even if the measure is abusive or completely useless.

That is unacceptable. Yet that is what some of us have been accused of by officials of the Commission when, for example, we question the measures in airport security or criticise a regulation that some days ago prevented a group of Catholic pilgrims returning from Lourdes in a Vatican aeroplane to bring holy water with them from Lourdes, which was considered a threat to security. We have the right to criticise that stupid piece of legislation and not accept the blackmail of being considered friends of terrorists, when fulfilling our responsibilities.

Mr Frattini, this is an area – and I am sorry to say this – in which you are avoiding your responsibilities and where you have left anti-terrorism legislation in the air transport sector in the hands of a group of zealots within the Commission, who are anonymously implementing this legislation in secret.

Your responsibility, as Vice-President of the Commission with responsibility for these matters – for this area – is to prevent this from happening or continuing to happen. Today you will have the legitimacy of a vote within Parliament that will give you the tools to go and make some demands on your colleague responsible for transport within the Commission. This is your responsibility, and we expect a lot of you.

Speeches about fundamental rights are blatantly contrary to secret legislation and strongly opposed to arbitrary restrictions on privacy and individual freedom.

Furthermore, much more efficient measures, which have already been approved, have not been implemented. Do that exercise that you know well how to do: name and shame. Name and shame the Member States that are not implementing the measures on judicial and political cooperation, and you will have all our support in that.

Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, so far the concept of terrorism has not been properly defined, and this is more than just an oral problem. It is a matter of the practical implementation of a strategy to combat one of the greatest threats to the modern world, one that concerns ordinary citizens.

One important area of the European strategy to combat terrorist organisations is transatlantic cooperation. The United States has shouldered the heaviest burden in tackling this grim phenomenon. Up to now, certain institutions such as the Council of Europe and, sadly, the European Parliament have set in motion such unhelpful actions as the appointment of strange commissions to try to find alleged CIA prisons in Europe. The work carried out by these bodies has not contributed to transatlantic cooperation; in fact it has fuelled anti-American feelings and thus significantly weakened the system of counter-terrorism.

We must express the hope that today's debate will initiate true commitment on the part of the European Parliament to building a counter-terrorism strategy, and not just the token commitment we have seen hitherto; this must be a strategy which truly aims to promote safety for all our citizens.

Mihael Brejc (PPE-DE). – (SL) It is appropriate ... how terrorism is defeated and in that respect I fully support Mr Frattini and the measures taken by the Commission. However, it is also appropriate for us to answer the question of why this is happening to us and who it is that is posing the threat.

Last year the Commission proposed that we should not use terms such as 'Islamic jihadism' and the like and that these people are instead, and I quote, 'terrorists who use religion for their activities'. I consider it essential that we recognise that the phenomenon should be called by its correct name. And to me the correct name is jihadi terrorism because these people are fundamentalists who share a hatred of democratic, pluralistic society. Their ideology is diametrically opposed to conventional democracies and their aim is to create a caliphate. Jihadism is often referred to as a religion vying with other religions and as an ideology seeking its place in the world, but this is incorrect. Jihadism is neither economically inspired nor capable of vying with other religions – it is an ideology aimed at destroying other ideologies.

Therefore, it is necessary to create in the European Parliament and the European institutions the conditions for spreading democracy in the world, a plan of action perhaps, and to strengthen economic and political cooperation with Islamic countries.

Democratic forces capable of confronting other forces exist in the Islamic world. Those democratic forces can be assisted by various forms of support, say by funding media stations spreading democratic ideas and exposing the acts of terrorists. It is also necessary to create the conditions for addressing all the various interpretations and opening up discussions, forums and web pages for free thinking Muslims. The public in Europe must also speak more about terrorism.

And finally, it is also important to recognise that in the fight against terrorism the European Union must be conscious of its values and defend them without fear and without worrying about tactics.

Dan Mihalache (PSE). – (RO) This debate is extremely important as it provides us with the opportunity to examine the consistency and coherence of our policies against terrorism. Today we have enough analytical data to say that the success of these policies relies on the close relationship between several main elements.

On the one hand, there are the measures on security and justice in the European Union, the correct ratio between these measures and the respect for fundamental human rights and on the other hand there is EU foreign policy and the fight against social exclusion, and the social causes of terrorism.

In my opinion, action without prevention is not enough; domestic measures are not enough without consistent external dialogue. Their correct mix should be the basis of a European model for combating terrorism, that could ensure the security of EU citizens and their fundamental rights respectively.

We have to admit that there is a deficiency in the relationship between the European Parliament, its legislative power and the field of the fight against terrorism and this triggers a democratic deficiency. In order to play an efficient part in the decision-making process at European level, we need total involvement of the Parliament in the co-decision procedure.

I would like to call on the Council to accelerate the procedure of electing a new EU anti-terrorism co-ordinator, with enhanced powers in relation to the strategies agreed.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, the EU's new counter-terrorism strategy is the right one, but no thanks to the new officials, bodies or organisations. The first responsibility for combating terrorism lies with the national governments and the independent Member States. For the fight against terrorism at national level to succeed, however, there needs to be highly effective European and international cooperation based on trust. As Commissioner Frattini said, trust is a precondition for cooperation. Trust depends on clear and precise European legislation, clear forms of cooperation, and a respect for human rights.

The fight against terrorism at airports has reached ludicrous proportions. For example, they confiscate lipstick. At the same time, the EU and many nation-states have forgotten that natural disasters can also be prevented.

(The President cut the speaker off)

Jan Tadeusz Masiel (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, in the field of medicine, when trying to combat a disease we concentrate not so much on its symptoms as on its deeper, hidden causes; in much the same way, when combating terrorism we must focus not only on a few kamikaze agents planting bombs, but also on the reasons why they are doing this.

Terrorism is a blind act of violence aimed at satisfying its own demands and inflicting suffering on those all around, and it clearly needs to be stopped. It is an unacceptable way of satisfying needs that are based on a certain hierarchy. It is not disinterested aggression. It is behaviour that we do not like, but it has its own sense. How can we show Muslims at this time that our hierarchy of needs is better than theirs? It is not possible, it is a complex ethical problem, but we must start somewhere. I suggest that we begin by showing greater respect for the needs of Muslims on their territory in order to lessen their effect in the Western world.

Barbara Kudrycka (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, in the global war on terror, the only way to ensure that fewer people die at the hands of ideological murderers is through good identification and assessment of terrorist threats. To this end we need a good and practicable European counter-terrorism strategy. The key to this strategy, in my view, is the creation of a European code of counter-terrorist procedure. I therefore welcome the Council's initiative on this matter.

Such a code is needed for reasons beyond simply harmonising the actions taken by Member States. It should also clearly define which measures are acceptable in the battle to prevent acts of terror. What we need, then,

is the identification and detailed specification of situations in which the threat of terrorism is to be treated as a state of emergency, and mutual agreement on the use of certain concrete measures and certain legal measures, which will unfortunately restrict citizens' rights and freedoms in some areas. The reasoned restriction of citizens' freedoms is necessary, because without such restrictions we can tell the terrorists right now: we care more about your rights and freedoms than we do about the rights of the people you are killing in your attacks.

It is also important to define the role of the counter-terrorism coordinator. We are faced with a choice: either we continue along the path of strengthening administrative competence and coordinating abilities, as during Mr de Vries's time – although that path demands that we engage in some serious reflection and draw conclusions from what has happened over the past four years – or we should consider boosting the political profile of whoever holds this post. However, then the issue of competition with Javier Solana arises. One way or another, the decision we take on this cannot simply be based on personal views.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) The riots in French suburbs and the bloody terrorist outrages in London which were committed by young, third-generation Muslims speaking with a Yorkshire accent highlight the crisis in the integration of migrant minorities in western Europe. An example of this is the Netherlands, which used to be one of the most tolerant of countries in Europe, but is now in effect facing a crisis in interethnic coexistence.

Even as we attempt to deal with the roots of the problem here in Europe in the fight against terror, it is time, as many people have suggested, for us to look again at the issue of the integration of minorities. Europe has not looked this question squarely in the face. Neither in the European Council nor in the European Union is there as yet a 'soft law' instrument on the problem of migrant minorities or – as I myself proposed in the European Council, and it was accepted – on the problem of new minorities, although we know that, in the problem of minorities, both migrant minorities and indigenous minorities, only the acceptance of two or more identities can be a guarantee. The best example for indigenous minorities is in fact the South Tyrol where they have dual identity, but many examples can be cited.

Europe will not advance if in this area, minority policy, we do not adopt such an instrument.

President. – It has been pointed out to me that I never say 'Mr or Mrs such and such, you have the floor, thank you'. This is not through rudeness but out of respect for your time, because I do not wish to waste it. That is why I would ask you to remain within the limits of the time set, or else we will never finish.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE). – (RO) Terrorism is a continuous threat in a Europe where Muslim extremism is often in operation. The European Union has to take adequate measures and to set up a coherent strategy, common to all Member States. The Commission's future legislative proposals with an indirect relationship to this phenomenon should include provisions contributing to the prevention of the spread and intensification of terrorist attacks. Such an example is the legislative package on legal and illegal migration.

The competent European institutions have to find, without any delay, an efficient way of cooperating based on trust and the exchange of information. The proper operation of a European Information Centre will depend on the Member States' mutual trust.

Beside the measures adopted at European level, every state has to contribute to the efficiency of joint action for fighting against all forms of terrorism. Member States such as Romania, where Islam terrorism is not considered a danger, should be as vigilant as the other European States facing this threat.

These states should receive information and be involved in joint European programmes contributing to the prevention of both the causes and situations triggering terrorist acts. We do not have to suffice ourselves with prevention or discovering acts of terrorism, we have to identify and fight against the factors favouring these phenomena, such as poverty, social exclusion or extremism.

Inter-religious dialogue can make a significant and decisive contribution to reducing terrorism. Religious leaders have to consider this issue a priority and to become involved in order to ensure peace, and the stability of the communities they are responsible for. A good example is the European Ecumenical Assembly taking place these days in Sibiu, Romania.

The European citizens have to be aware of the danger embodied by terrorism. An information campaign and presentation of all conflict-generating issues should trigger citizen involvement, together with the institutions, in order to eradicate this phenomenon.

Genowefa Grabowska (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, terrorism is a clear evil – it strikes at the life and health of citizens and conveys a threat to nations by cutting at the foundations of their democratic functioning; so far, however, the terrorists have stayed ahead of the game, striking without warning and sadly often succeeding. It is only after such attacks that we undertake counter-measures, and thus we are acting *ex post*. The examples of Denmark and Germany cited today by the Commissioner are commendable exceptions to this. Congratulations to their services, but these were national actions, and my question to the Commissioner is this: what about prevention at European level? Do we have a system of exchanging good practice in combating terrorism, and how does it work?

The European Union is adopting new anti-terrorism measures and setting up specialist institutions: we now have Europol and Eurojust, we have the Union's Situation Centre, SitCen, but do they cooperate effectively with each other, and more particularly, do they exchange information? In this context, in the context of institutions, I have a further question for the Commissioner: in your opinion, would Frontex, the institution responsible for guarding the Union's frontiers, not be better utilised and involved in the anti-terrorism strategy? I also have the impression that the delay in introducing SIS II is seriously weakening this strategy. It appears that Schengen II is important not only to the citizens of the new states, but also, in the context of the war on terror, to the security of the Union as a whole.

Bogdan Klich (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, Monday's arrests in Copenhagen show that terrorism is still a real threat in Europe. Europol's report reveals that it remained at a high level throughout last year. Suffice it to say that last year 498 terrorist acts were recorded.

It is true that this threat is not evenly distributed, with as many as 294 instances taking place in France and 145 in Spain, but at a time of globalisation, the whole territory of the European Union is of interest to terrorists. Moreover, this is not altered by the fact that a significant majority of these acts are separatist in nature (something Europe has spent decades getting used to), such as Basque or Corsican terrorism, or the left-wing anarchy in Greece.

Does this process of getting used to terrorism mean that we in Europe are well prepared to fight it? My conviction is that that the answer is still no. Implementation of the basic conceptual documents, even something as fundamental as the counter-terrorism strategy, or the legislative instruments in the shape of the framework decision of June 2002, leaves much to be desired.

Coordination of prevention and reaction to acts of terrorism is also unsatisfactory. In this regard there is an urgent need to upgrade such cooperation, especially operational cooperation and the exchange of information between Member States; we need to enhance the capacities of Europol and Eurojust; we need – and this is something we keep calling for – to strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure, especially for transport and energy. We must also insist that the solidarity clause that was written into the earlier draft of the Constitutional Treaty is included in the new treaty and that a suitable anti-terrorism clause is incorporated into agreements with third countries; my report was calling for this before the holidays.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). – (PT) (inaudible) ... the Council's reluctance to give Europol, Eurojust, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and the SitCen any institutional, legal or financial muscle, which could transform *ad hoc* links into a genuine strategic cooperation against terrorism. Various Member States have not yet even ratified the main international conventions in this field.

Al-Qaida and ETA do not respect borders or national sovereignty, but our police and secret services are still hampered by inadequate barriers. Europe needs to be not only more effective, but also more strict, because the anything-goes approach is precisely the way terrorists think and international terrorism did not in fact make its advance in New York, Bali, Madrid, London or even Baghdad. Its greatest triumph, which every day brings it more recruits, was handed to it by democratic governments, by the ease with which they sacrifice fundamental values, rights and guarantees: the pillars of democracy and civilisation.

Europe needs to clear its name, miserably besmirched by the systematic collaboration of European governments with the Bush Administration in the abduction, unlawful detention and torture of terrorist suspects. Parliament is still waiting for explanations from those governments. Europe needs to be more effective in strategic cooperation, internally and with its allies, in order to defeat terrorism but also in order to defeat it through political ideas and through law.

The Portuguese Presidency, under a socialist government, has an obligation to try to make a difference.

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, terrorism is a crime against humanity and represents the greatest threat to our society; and sadly it has already taken on a European dimension. The question is: has the European Union taken action? The answer is a clear 'yes', and the successes show that the measures taken have been good ones. There have been arrests in Denmark and Germany, thank goodness. I am obliged to Commissioner Frattini for his commitment in this regard; it shows that the Commission is on the right track.

However, we also need a review of whether our measures are effective, which measures are effective and which new ones are needed. We should also ask ourselves whether our overall strategy is sufficient. At all events, we should continue to work on such a strategy following the review. This strategy is certainly needed before we can decide whether there is to be a new Counter-Terrorism Coordinator. We must also make it clear in advance to Member States that, if there were to be another such coordinator, he or she would have to have the necessary powers and responsibilities, because otherwise we would certainly not need such a post.

I agree with many others that, at all events, we must strengthen and make use of Europol and Eurojust. These are successful and have the instruments at their disposal. We have taken decisions like that of yesterday on implementing rules simplifying the use of analysis files, and an explosives database is to be set up. However, the problem is the provision of data by Member States. I would appeal to you, President-in-Office, to exert pressure on Member States to provide data in time.

President-in-Office, you said that regular talks were being held with the United States. This is a good thing, and makes sense, but I would entreat you to take every opportunity to render the cooperation fruitful, in the interests of both parties. In other words, I would ask you to negotiate such that, the moment there is a suspicion of terrorism, the United States is obliged ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Libor Rouček (PSE). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, terrorism represents a serious threat to peace, stability and prosperity in Europe.

As has already been mentioned, terrorism also constitutes an attack on the fundamental values that are the basis of European integration: human rights, the rule of law, freedom and democracy. That is why I believe that the response from the European Union and the Member States to threats of terrorism must be radical and unequivocal. This decisive response should not, however, consist merely of repressive security measures. Instead it should focus on prevention and preventive measures more so than it has done thus far, both within the Member States and externally in relationships with our overseas neighbours.

The objective of our common foreign and security policy should be to strengthen economic and social development, support for civil society and the concept of human rights, striving for peaceful solution to international conflicts, including the Israeli - Palestinian conflict. To a greater extent our common foreign and security policy should also concentrate on support for, and development of, regional cooperation in the framework of both the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Barcelona Process.

Last but not least, Madam President, Commissioner, along with our friends from the US and other countries we should draught a comprehensive UN convention against terrorism.

Herbert Reul (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we have seen tragic events in Madrid and London. We have seen attacks fail, for example because of the discovery or failed detonation of suitcases, as happened in Germany. Moreover, in recent days we have again seen efficient police work head off attacks in good time, such as today's news also from Germany. This makes it clear, of course, that terrorism is a real and great danger, and it is without doubt one of our key tasks as politicians to protect people, to protect human life.

Many of my fellow Members have argued today that one or other of the measures is borderline, and that we must consider whether it represents an excessive threat to civil and fundamental rights. I consider this a valid question, and agree that this must be examined in earnest, but this examination must not be drawn out for so long that potential measures that are necessary are debated to death. I believe that we bear responsibility to protect people and human life, and that is the most important thing. That is our top priority, and therefore I call on us as political leaders to advocate the necessary measures rather than discuss them to death or, for example, forget amid all the criticism to win people over to them – because there is no alternative to them.

I have no time for those contributions to the debate that offset, as it were, any behaviour on the part of the United States or other countries in this regard. I do not understand this. It is our duty to protect human life and to implement the necessary measures, and I am obliged to the Commissioner for the further, very specific, proposals he has made today. I am obliged to those who have said that we must weigh up whether our measures actually do what they are supposed to do. I am firmly on the side of those who advocate a careful review of whether new institutions are necessary, or whether these tasks cannot also be done very well by existing institutions.

The fight against terrorism plays a vital role, and this is the way it has to be. Incidentally, in future, if the framework agreement is implemented, we will have ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE). – Madam President, I strongly support the demand for effective, efficient, balanced and accountable security at the European and international level in addressing terrorism.

If we are to avoid feeding the threat, democratic accountability is essential to ensure balance and proportionality. But a security response, no matter how effective, is not sufficient. We must address the international, political and economic injustices which certain demagogues are using to tap into a youthful hunger for justice.

Their appeal is based on a tabloid history, a tabloid politics, which denies the nuances and contradictions which are integral to all of our political and religious traditions.

The battle for hearts and minds requires us to avoid demonising whole communities of religious believers. It requires open dialogue, not confrontation; it requires us to address the real and perceived disconnection that some young people are experiencing. Europe's idea of 'unity through diversity' could help, but that requires courageous political leadership, which, unfortunately, is sadly lacking at Council level.

Finally, could I appeal at least to the people, the representatives in this House, to avoid sloppy language, which implies sloppy thinking. Equating fundamentalism automatically with terrorism is sloppy thinking. There are millions upon millions of Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims who believe literally in the Old Testament, in the New Testament and the Koran, but they are not terrorists. There are a tiny number of people who have a literal reading of their religion who are involved in terrorism. We have to address why that is the case.

Charlotte Cederschiöld (PPE-DE). – Madam President, terrorism is a threat to all states and to all peoples: it poses a serious menace to our security, to the values of our democratic societies and to the rights and the freedoms of citizens.

Obviously, new measures have increased the efficiency in the fight against terrorism, but there is more to do. We need to show that the creative measures really protect citizens and that they are proportionate to the infringement in the personal sphere. I doubt whether the regulation on liquids on aeroplanes is proportionate to its purpose. Some innocent people lose important medicines, not to mention the tonnes of confiscated shampoos, lipsticks etc.

If this brings full security, it will be accepted, but citizens question how this is being handled – improvements are probably possible. To strike the right balance is to enforce anti-terrorism, the fight against crime, and fundamental rights in a democratic society based on the rule of law. It should include information to the European Parliament before any European-US deal is signed, and we have full trust in Commissioner Frattini and the Commission in this respect.

To accomplish legitimacy in this field we need increased democratic control through codecision, and European citizens should play a larger part in the decision-making process; we need more transparency and more democratic legitimacy. The Council must motivate its measures in public at European level. We also need to improve transatlantic relations.

Finally, there is a need for tough anti-terror measures. It will be much easier to achieve that if we better accept our own democratic ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Giulietto Chiesa (PSE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the summit last April between the European Union and the United States was a lost opportunity. In the light of the results of the European

Parliament's special committee on secret CIA flights Washington should have been clearly told that progress in transatlantic cooperation on the fight against terrorism can only be based on compliance with Article 6 of the EU Treaty and full respect for human rights.

This was not done: that means that not only will the fight against terrorism not be strengthened, but it will be weakened because, as this Parliament itself has said, as well as being counter-productive, it is unacceptable to combat terrorism using illegal, terrorist methods.

The EU Member States that submitted to US pressure in using these methods have not only infringed the fundamental principles of the EU but have also opened up a path to illegality, exposing Europe to increased risks of terrorist retaliation. Stepping up the fight against terrorism means, above all, doing so in full compliance with the law.

Maria da Assunção Esteves (PPE-DE). – (PT) Terrorism challenges our free and open society. It sometimes even makes us feel tempted to create security legislation which comes very close to eroding the values of our civilisation.

The European Union must therefore, as a matter of urgency, draw up a joint code clearly setting out its principles and methods.

Firstly, it must guarantee the principles of human dignity and the rule of law in all aspects of combating terrorism. We cannot undermine the moral foundations of democracy which rest on those very values. As Simone de Beauvoir said, *we must not allow our executioners to give us bad habits*.

Secondly, uniform legislation must be created for the Member States. Union on this aspect must actually mean Union. The fight against terrorism urgently requires the application of rules which are unified and coherent; that cannot be left to the impulses of each Member State and the public opinion of the moment.

Thirdly, we need to encourage working as a network and to promote consensus via the approval of measures in the European Parliament and the national parliaments.

Fourthly, the European Union needs to work towards setting up a UN international mechanism for monitoring emergency procedures and legislation. This fight against terrorism is on a grand scale and is not merely confined to Europe or the Euro-Atlantic axis.

Finally, in order to fight terrorism we need to work towards creating a fairer and more balanced international community; we need to identify causes and fractures, promote a culture of rights that takes in all peoples, and work hard to promote dialogue between civilisations. Terrorism is a complex phenomenon. We cannot respond to it with a simplistic interpretation.

Ioannis Varvitsiotis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Madam President, let me first of all put two fundamental questions to the Council: firstly, why is Mr de Vries's seat still vacant, even after such a long time? Does the Council intend to fill it? Does the Council consider it useful? Yes or no?

Secondly, why have the adopted anti-terrorism measures not been properly enforced by all Member States?

More important still is the question of whether, in our effort to counter terrorism, we have taken steps merely as a reaction to terrorist activity. Are we following an intelligent, integrated strategy in aiming to combat the causes of terrorism? We should never lose sight of this. Fear for our own security often causes us to adopt strategies that create a false sense of security.

I have repeatedly asserted here that the protection of public security is our common, self-evident aim. However, our method is proof of the maturity of our civilisation. Respect for our rights is not merely inalienably ours; it is our only path to welfare and security.

I believe that we need not only to evaluate the effectiveness of all anti-terrorism measures to date, but also to take careful stock of our progress, which must not consist merely of a series of reactions to terrorist activity.

Discussions between the Council, the Commission and Parliament must therefore be stepped up. The cooperation of the Member States is of vital importance. Lastly, I believe that we should step up the dialogue with third countries. I consider this essential, as we have seen how useful cooperation with the United States has been.

Józef Pinior (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, today's debate concerns the war on terror, the issue of security, the rule of law and personal freedoms, i.e. the highest values in the EU system. The European Parliament is tabling a series of questions for the Council and the Commission, the solutions to which are crucial to the security of citizens, the respect for law and the status of citizens' freedoms.

I wish to concentrate here on the issue of the transparency of the European Union's anti-terrorism strategy. Democratic control in this area, and especially the role of the European Parliament and national parliaments, guarantees the observance of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Treaty on European Union. May I remind you that the European Parliament's resolution on the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the transportation and illegal detention of prisoners recommends the use of methods that are in line with Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union.

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I have just come from a press conference calling for rigorous implementation of economic sanctions against the Iranian regime, a notorious sponsor of terrorism across the Middle East and beyond.

I am sure we all welcome measures that genuinely help in combating terrorism, but I wonder how much of the long list of EU activity that we have heard about this morning falls into this category.

The EU is very good at extending its competences and adding to its bureaucratic apparatus but has little to show for its activity and expenditure.

We have had some discussion of the EU counter-terrorism coordinator. His title implies some sort of oversight role which is wholly inappropriate. To my mind, such a person should focus on the workings of the EU and on limited areas where there is clear added value from joint action.

I have great respect for Commissioner Frattini but the EU really cannot claim credit for the actions of our national police and security services. It would be useful to carry out an independent audit of the EU's so-called counter-terrorist measures.

Counter-terrorism must remain a national responsibility and a matter of international cooperation. The EU should be concentrating on ways in which it can support that nationally-delivered counter-terrorism effort.

One of the serious difficulties in our efforts to protect our citizens comes in the failure to control our borders; terrorists come and go and continued uncontrolled immigration is a major obstacle to the proper integration of our settled immigrants. This must be a key element in any counter-terrorist strategy.

This problem also brings into question the whole principle of free movement of people and that is another area that should be examined again by an independent body.

I mentioned the responsibility of our national authorities for these matters. I am sorry to say that the British authorities have failed disastrously to control our borders. Not only do we have little idea who enters and leaves our country but there are serious question marks over the Border and Immigration Agency, which is charged with implementing controls.

I am alarmed to read that a woman who for many months knew the suspected terrorists currently on trial for terrorist offences in Glasgow and who apparently did not report his activities is now employed as an immigration ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Marianne Mikko (PSE) – (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, in discussing combating terrorism I would like to focus on Article 6 of the Maastricht Treaty, which concerns fundamental rights and freedoms.

My work as leader of the delegation to Moldova and as a social democrat has been dedicated to the security of Europe, safeguarding our values and disseminating them in the neighbourhood policy countries. We want stability and peace to reign in the vicinity of the European Union. To combat terrorism we also need support from countries such as Pakistan, Russia and even Iran.

Our successful defence of our values depends to a great extent on how we are able to involve partners. Any curtailment of fundamental freedoms and rights in the European Union is reflected back fifteen-fold by the 15 neighbourhood policy countries, to say nothing of Russia and China. Third countries observe what we do, not what we say.

The Commission and the Council must understand that the backing of our own citizens in the fight against terrorism will evaporate if we are unable to honour some of the fundamental rights enshrined in our founding treaties.

Jana Hybášková (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I am not going to take part in this stupid debate on liquids. The only people entitled to do so are security and technical experts. If they come to clear conclusions, then it is only our duty to react immediately. Nothing scares terrorists more than our ability to react.

The threat of terrorism is built on our rigidity – the rigidity of settled, conservative systems – and our lack of ability to adapt to new dimensions in communication, flows of information, money transfers and flows of persons. The only way forward is to create floating structures, ad hoc teams, the horizontal, interoperable sharing of information and cross-agency and cross-state cooperation, and to empower Europol and Eurojust. The resignation of Mr de Vries was clearly a very bad sign. It was confirmation of the EU's inability to overcome a stupid, old-fashioned, nation-based security approach. It was sadly symptomatic of a lack of ability to share information and execute decisions. The Reform Treaty, on the other hand, sends a great and positive signal.

Minimum rules on police cooperation, the approximation of criminal and civil codes, mutual recognition of criminal and civil judgments, as well as EU protection of evidence, victims of crimes and criminals themselves, are measures which state that with a lot of energy, money and political pain we can cope with terrorism and that we can be of some help to the European citizens of London, Glasgow and other threatened locations.

Commissioner, Member States have until December 2007 to implement the third Money Laundering Directive. I call on the Commission to be clear and decisive in its push for implementation of the necessary security measures to control money laundering and the financing of terrorism. This will be of help to us and we have to help you. Then we can say clearly that we are ready to fight and to win.

Paulo Casaca (PSE). – (PT) 12 December 2006 is a historic date, when the European Court ruled fully in favour of the argument that, years ago, I defended in this very Chamber against the Council and the Commission, on the right to be informed about an accusation of terrorism. Justice will not be done, however, and there will be no real fight against terrorism as long as innocent victims remain on that list, such as the People's Mujahidin of Iran, and whilst the world's foremost terrorist organisation – the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and all their satellite organisations in Iraq, Lebanon, the Gulf and throughout the world – continue to act with impunity, unchallenged because the European institutions are afraid to confront the terrorist beast.

I appeal to the institutions to do what they are in fact called upon to do.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I think this has been an extremely useful, interesting and highly opportune debate, all the more so in the light of recent events in Denmark and Germany, as mentioned previously.

I shall relay many of your suggestions, concerns and advice to the Council – as is my duty – and I should like to assure you that the Portuguese Presidency is, naturally, open to cooperation and dialogue with Parliament, having regard to the legal provisions by which we are governed.

This is naturally a difficult and complex debate. Some people think that we should go further; others think we have gone too far and should perhaps take a step back. Some people criticise whilst others applaud; some condemn, others encourage. However, we all, of course, agree that we must wage a firm and determined fight against this new scourge known as terrorism and that we must in no way call any truces in this fight. This is for us too a learning process, a continuous process of improvement. This is a new threat which was not known to us before and which we were not used to fighting and tackling. We therefore naturally need to be constantly improving, learning and active to ensure that there is no repetition of attacks such as those we have witnessed.

We have worked hard and, quite rightly, cooperated and collaborated widely with third countries. This is an international fight. No Member State standing alone could effectively face either the struggle or the threat which lie ahead of us and neither could any organisation or any group of countries standing alone. We need very strong international cooperation.

In preparing for this debate, I made a note of the set of measures and actions we have taken in the field of prevention, protection, pursuit and response to terrorist attacks. I concluded that, although there is still much to be done, a great deal has already been done and we shall have to try to improve in those areas where

we have not done as well as we should have. Here it is essential to mention the evaluation mechanisms which we have set up specifically to enable us, after the measures have been in operation for some time, to draw conclusions to help us to improve the measures taken.

I should like to say that for the Portuguese Presidency as for the Council, the fight against terrorism can only be waged and will only be waged, I can assure you, within the framework of respect for our fundamental values and principles, the very points at risk in our fight against terrorism: that is, the defence of those principles and those values. It would not do for us to neglect or disregard them in our fight against terrorism. The Portuguese Presidency will be particularly vigilant on that point and will not compromise.

Finally, I should like to say – this point has received great attention here and I mentioned it myself in my first speech – that the Presidency is working in close coordination with the Secretary-General of the Council in examining the issue of the counter-terrorism coordinator, that is, how to extend his powers and capabilities to enable him effectively to play the role for which the position was originally created. I realise that there might be some delay here. The Portuguese Presidency undertakes to speed up the debate within the Council's bodies and, at the appropriate time, announce the appointment of a new counter-terrorism coordinator.

As I said, I will of course take away advice, suggestions and concerns from this debate. We are not and never shall be indifferent to your points of view; we do not claim, and never have claimed, to be perfect or to say that all we have done was well done, irreproachable or not open to criticism. On the contrary, our efforts will always be directed towards improvement in order to ensure that our societies always remain free, open and democratic societies, standing up to those societies who do not want that to be the case. Thank you very much.

Franco Frattini, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank all those who have spoken in this debate, which is so important. Some have said that terrorism pursues a political strategy. I agree with this, Mr Mayor Oreja. Terrorism must be tackled with a global political strategy.

You have said a lot about prevention, and the fight against violent radicalisation. In my introduction I gave some specific indications about some proposals. I can tell you that there is an important initiative on violent radicalisation.

In a little over a month, on 16 and 17 October, a European conference will be held for the first time on the role of education and schools in eradicating violent radicalisation among the youngest members of society. We have called upon the world of education in Europe and, obviously, I invite observers from the European Parliament who would like to participate. This will be an opportunity to say clearly that we want to replace the culture of evil and violence with a culture of tolerance and cooperation.

We are mapping all the initiatives launched in the Member States to combat radicalisation and prevent the recruitment of terrorists. The results and the good practices revealed by this mapping will naturally be made available to Parliament.

We have talked a lot about dissemination and exchange of data and information. Often, ladies and gentlemen, we have a lot of data, in fact an overdose of data, but no adequate analysis of the data. This is why we need to give Europol a stronger role. I thank all those who supported the strengthening of Europol, including Mr Pirker. Last December I put a proposal before Council on this subject and I hope that the Portuguese Presidency will support the adoption, before the end of this year, of an increased analytical role for Europol.

In July an initiative on bioterrorism was presented. We indicated very clearly what the vulnerable sectors are and where greater European cooperation is required – I am addressing Mr Borghezio who raised the issue. Some have spoken of failures by the Member States to act. I am in favour of 'naming and shaming exercises'. Last June I published a document highlighting very clearly which Member States are in default even in implementing the legislation in force against terrorism. This shows, and here I am addressing Mr Guardans Cambó in particular, that I am ready to point out responsibilities, but these exercises will only be useful if all the Member States and the Council regard a statement of failure to act as a suggestion and encouragement to move forward.

Many have spoken about transatlantic relations. I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that greater collaboration with the United States is required, and, at the same time that we need more involvement by Europe. Among others, I would like to thank Mr Cashman for having expressed this principle. It does not make sense for us to be slow in preparing and developing a European model and at the same time to reproach the United States because they, in fact, do have a model. I think that more European input is needed, and more collaboration

with the United States, but there is no need to say that Europe's problem is the United States. The problem is the terrorists and their activities in the heart of Europe. This is the point to bear in mind.

(Applause)

One last thought: I am certain that the new European Treaty will give us better instruments, that it will give us an instrument with which to work together with Parliament in order finally to create co-responsibility between the three institutions. This will also give us in the Commission and the Council more strength. I think that at that moment all citizens will be able to understand and see, transparently, who has made a mistake, who has acted correctly and who has not acted when they should have done. Thus, the hope is that this treaty will become a reality, that it will be agreed, finally, and that this Parliament will become, with us, a fully-fledged institutional actor in the fight against terrorism.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you, Mr Frattini. I apologise for the noise, but it was not a lack of courtesy towards you.

The joint debate is closed.

The vote will take place on 11 October.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) As in previous debates, the majority of the EP, the Commission and the Council have avoided going into detail or even making a serious analysis either of terrorism – in all its forms, including State terrorism – or of the 'fight against terrorism'; it is clear that they are constantly trying to take the analysis of terrorism out of context in order to draw a veil over the deep causes of terrorism and the policies that engender terrorism.

Such conduct is all the more serious and politically significant when it is increasingly evident in the 'fight against terrorism' – in which the USA and the EU play leading roles – that the peoples of the world are facing an instrument for failing to respect international law, overturning the sovereignty of peoples and placing at risk the independence of States by promoting intervention, aggression and war, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq or Palestine, with their hundreds of thousands of victims.

Even though some speakers have repeated to exhaustion the safeguarding of human rights in this 'fight against terrorism' and in the offensive of security measures backing up that fight, a growing number of situations and facts point to a failure to respect citizens' fundamental freedoms, rights and guarantees.

Alexander Stubb (PPE-DE), in writing. – The EU is all about free movement of people, goods, services and capital. Obstacles for these are to be taken seriously. The fight against terrorism as part of international crime must not be neglected.

Terrorism is, however, a delicate topic. We must not ever forget that all policies on counter-terrorism have to be based on respect for fundamental rights and human dignity.

Measures also need to be effective and proportionate to the gain of security. I doubt, for example, that the new restrictions on liquids on aeroplanes meet these criteria.

All in all, every effort towards better coordination between Member States, and between them and the EU institutions, should be welcomed. After Mr de Vries stepped down, a new EU anti-terrorism coordinator should be appointed as soon as possible.

IN THE CHAIR: MR COCILOVO

Vice-President

Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, I would only note that, during the debate, the President-in-Office of the Council – who has already left – and the Commission were asked some very precise questions to which we have not received replies. I should like a written reply from the Council and the Commission to my questions regarding the High-Level Contact Group on Data Protection and the US Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance Act.

President. – We will proceed in line with the Rules of Procedure and also on the basis of the request made.

3. Membership of Parliament: see Minutes

4. Order of business: see Minutes

Richard Howitt (PSE). – Mr President, on a point of order, can I ask for an urgent action by the President of Parliament to call for the protection of a delegation from Colombia which visited our Parliament on 27 and 28 June, and whose members this week received a public death threat because they had spoken out here in favour of the proposal for a humanitarian exchange of prisoners in the Colombian conflict?

The accusation that the delegation's members, including Yolanda Pulecio de Betancourt, mother of the French former Colombian presidential candidate, Monsignor Luis Augusto Castro, the head of the Catholic Church in Colombia, and Dr Jose Noe Rios, the general secretary of the Colombian Liberal Party, are all supporters of the country's guerrilla movement, is both preposterous and puts the group in grave danger.

On humanitarian grounds alone, I ask the President to do everything possible to make representations for their safety.

(Applause)

5. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

(For the results and other details on the vote: see Minutes)

5.1. Balancing fishing capacity and fishing opportunities (vote)

- **Report: Casaca (A6-0297/2007)**

5.2. Draft amending budget No 5/2007 (vote)

- **Report: Elles (A6-0300/2007)**

5.3. Inland transport of dangerous goods (vote)

- **Report: Liberadzki (A6-0253/2007)**

6. Welcome

President. – A delegation from the South African Parliament is seated in the official visitors' gallery. I would like to warmly welcome the South African delegation, which is here to participate in the 10th EP–South Africa interparliamentary meeting, to be held from 5 to 6 September.

(Applause)

7. Voting time (continued)

(Before the vote)

Gary Titley (PSE). – Mr President, concerning declarations of interest, could you explain to me whether, in the vote on the next three reports on milk, the dairy farmers among us should declare an interest and refrain from voting?

(Applause)

President. – Obviously, Mr Titley, we proceed on the basis of declarations signed by individual MEPs with reference to conflicts of interest at the time of taking on the mandate and with reference to individual parliamentary procedures.

7.1. Dehydrated preserved milk for human consumption (vote)

- Report: Jeggle (A6-0282/2007)

7.2. Common organisation of the milk and milk products market (vote)

- Report: Jeggle (A6-0283/2007)

7.3. Additional rules on the common organisation of the milk and milk products markets (vote)

- Report: Jeggle (A6-0284/2007)

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Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE). – Mr President, as we have a delegation from the South African Parliament in the Gallery, could we ask them to take back from this House a message of condemnation of the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe and our expectation that South Africa should bring in appropriate measures to bring about change for the better in that country?

(Applause)

President. – I note your request, which I personally welcome, and we will try to deal with it while complying with parliamentary rules, as we conduct the votes.

7.4. Restrictions imposed by the EU on liquids that passengers can take on board aeroplanes (vote)

- Resolution: B6-0267/2007

7.5. Freight transport logistics in Europe and sustainable mobility (vote)

- Report: Ayala Sender (A6-0286/2007)

7.6. EURES activity report 2004-2005: Towards a single European labour market (vote)

- Resolution: B6-0322/2007

7.7. Reducing alcohol-related harm (vote)

- Report: Foglietta (A6-0303/2007)

8. Explanations of vote

- Report: Casaca (A6-0297/2007)

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We regard the sustainability of fishery resources as essential for the continuation of fishing activity and the viability of the fisheries sector, but we do not accept a fleet management policy – as adopted in the EU – or a reduction in the fleet, the main consequences of which will be a significant reduction in the means of production and a drastic loss of jobs.

To achieve the objective of a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities, account must be taken of the social and economic situation in the fisheries sector by applying mechanisms for subsidising or compensating fishermen affected by the economic consequences of an environmentally

friendly fishing activity and by measures to reduce fishing, especially in less-favoured regions that are dependent upon the fisheries sector.

Similarly, the fishing effort should be matched to existing resources and to the protection of the marine environment – which would at one and the same time promote small-scale coastal fishing and non-industrial fishing and safeguard fishing communities; it would be particularly helpful in that context to increase Member States' exclusive fishing zones from the current 12 nautical miles to 24 nautical miles and for outermost regions from 100 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles.

Robert Navarro (PSE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of the report by my colleague Mr Casaca because it clearly underlines the perverse effects of the current system, which sometimes causes decisions to be taken that are disconnected from local realities.

Take, for example, the case of thonaille fishing in the Mediterranean. Those who do it have made efforts to develop their fishing methods, but legislation adopted recently is putting disproportionate restrictions on them that are in danger of causing their disappearance. They are in fact facing unfair competition from their colleagues in the Eastern Atlantic, both Spanish and French. In accordance with the report's proposals, an approach using geographical fishing areas and taking account of the specific features of the techniques employed would have made it possible to ensure a fairer distribution of fishing effort capable of guaranteeing a sustainable balance between fishing capacity and fishing opportunities.

- Report: Elles (A6-0300/2007)

Glyn Ford (PSE), in writing. – I support the Elles report on the draft amending budget No 5/2007. In doing so, I would like to point out a particular problem for my own country that might mitigate against support for additional spending.

The problem Britain has is that Margaret Thatcher with the 1984 Fontainebleau Agreement left future British Governments with a poison pill. Fontainebleau gives Britain back a rebate of two-thirds the difference between our annual contributions and annual receipts from the EU. Thus any new expenditure programmes cost Britain twice; first we pay our 50% and then lose two thirds of the EU contribution, diminishing uniquely in our case the EU contribution from 50% to less than 17%. Allowing for the fact Britain's contributions are just below 15% of the total budget, any new project for which Britain receives less than a third of the benefits leaves Britain out of pocket.

- Report: Liberadzki (A6-0253/2007)

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The report states that approximately 110 billion tonnes/km of dangerous goods – dangerous for the population and the environment – are transported annually within the EU, accounting for almost 8% of total transportation of goods. Of those, 58% are transported by rail, 25% by air and 17% by inland waterways.

The international transportation of dangerous goods is regulated by international agreements.

In that context, we believe that the useful and necessary cooperation at EU level must safeguard the full sovereignty of the Member States as regards the transportation of (dangerous) goods within their territory, for example by means of the right to regulate, to issue individual authorisations and forbid the transportation of dangerous goods, notably for reasons of national security or environmental protection.

This is a matter of principle that is all the more important in the context of the unbridled liberalisation of transportation promoted by the EU.

Dieter-Lebrecht Koch (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) The Commission proposal on the simplification and unification of European legislation on the transport of dangerous goods should be endorsed in its entirety, including in the interests of better regulation.

As recently as 31 August 2007 I visited the traffic management headquarters for seven road tunnels, among them the longest tunnel in Germany, and became aware of the need for harmonisation, particularly of the provisions on the transport of dangerous goods in tunnels.

The transport not only of goods *per se*, but also of dangerous goods, is growing rapidly – and this is happening worldwide so that even the increase can no longer be absorbed by a single mode of transport. It makes sense, therefore, to adopt the relevant rules for transport not only by road and rail, but also by inland waterway.

This improves the chances of applying the co-modal approach to the problem of our transport needs. It is particularly worthy of mention in terms of the understanding of our fellow citizens that the present legal act takes account not only of the specific recommendations of the United Nations but also of Member States' subsidiarity requirements. The fact that the directive summarises four 'old' directives and saves 2 000 pages of legislative text makes it an example of bureaucracy reduction in action.

Member States will retain the right to regulate or even prohibit the transport of certain dangerous goods within their territory, for example, for reasons of national security or of environmental protection. In the final analysis, the public can expect this directive to make a contribution to improving both transport safety and environmental safety.

Fernand Le Rachinel (ITS), in writing. – (FR) For once the Commission proposal aimed at harmonising the rules for the transport of dangerous goods is a step in the right direction. Indeed the proposed text aims to simplify and unify existing Community legislation.

Currently no less than four directives and many Commission decisions govern the transport of dangerous goods by land (rail, road) and inland waterways. This disparate collection means that the rules are too complex, difficult to transpose into national legislation and often obsolete.

This is a particularly important subject because the volume of inland transport in the EU is constantly increasing, as is the volume of dangerous goods. Nearly 110 billion tonnes/km/year of these goods are transported annually in the EU, amounting to 8% of all goods transported. Because of its strategic position as the crossroads of Europe, France's road, rail and waterway networks are often congested and therefore particularly subject to transport accidents.

It is high time all the peripheral, excessive EU legislation on this matter was eliminated to enable the various operators, but also the national authorities, to guarantee and fully strengthen the safety of this type of transport.

Andreas Mölzer (ITS), in writing. – (DE) Given the continuous rise in freight transport, the catastrophic lorry fire in the Gotthard Tunnel and similar occurrences will certainly not be the last horror stories about lorry accidents. This is particularly the case since lorries play a disproportionately frequent role in accidents on motorways, and since rest periods are often not observed owing to ever decreasing margins and ever increasing competitive pressure. Poorly upgraded roads and the formation of tailbacks also increase the potential danger.

If a vehicle transporting dangerous goods is involved in such an accident, the consequences are, of course, all the more serious. In addition, time and again, radioactive, corrosive or explosive freight is transported illegally, putting the emergency services in mortal danger when accidents occur. It is only right and proper that the safety requirements be updated, which is why I, too, voted in favour of the report, although checks should also be reinforced accordingly.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) One of the EU's basic obligations and responsibilities is to create safe living conditions for European citizens. The volume of inland goods transport within the EU is constantly expanding and, in line with that increase, the volume of dangerous goods transported has also been rising.

We therefore need to ensure that the legislation applicable to the transportation of dangerous goods is simplified and clarified. The intention to include under a single directive the transportation of dangerous goods by rail, road and inland waterways might encourage co-modality and, by the application of established rules, improve safety and speed based on the adoption of new criteria on fast delivery of goods and provision of the relevant services. A prerequisite for that is, therefore, ever greater safety in transportation throughout the territory of the EU, including the transportation of dangerous goods; I believe that will be possible with the implementation of the measures contained in this directive.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I am voting in favour of Bogusław Liberadzki's report on the inland transport of dangerous goods.

Professor Liberadzki is a leading specialist in the field of transport. The report he presents is professionally written and gives an in-depth analysis of the problem raised.

One of the European Union's priorities is undoubtedly to ensure that Europeans enjoy safe living conditions. This also includes the safety of transport throughout the Union, and particularly the transport of dangerous goods. The increased circulation of goods and services has brought about an increase in road, rail and river

transport. That is why I am supporting the initiative to bring these forms of transport together under a single directive. I feel that at European level we should strive to establish legislation with the greatest added value for EU citizens. Encapsulating the regulations in a single EU document will enhance their transparency and accessibility and also the efficacy of their application.

- Reports: Jeggle (A6-0282/2007, A6-0283/2007, A6-0284/2007)

Andreas Mölzer (ITS). – (DE) Mr President, I voted in favour of the Jeggle reports, because I hope they will facilitate the survival of our farmers. After all, there was a time when farmers could make a very good living from their produce. Nowadays, food prices are rising continuously but, whilst large enterprises benefit from this and harvest handsome profit margins, simple farmers are pushed increasingly into the role of supplicants. Often, smallholders need a supplementary source of income to survive, and the love of nature is the overriding and only reason many take on this dual burden. Increasing numbers are throwing in the towel, however, which has already led to a dependence on imports in the field of fruit, vegetables and feeding-stuff production.

Since EU accession, over 50% of Austrian farmers have given up their businesses; that is, ceased milk production. Thus we are rapidly approaching the point at which our self-sufficiency in fresh milk and fresh-milk products is under threat.

Hynek Fajmon (PPE-DE). – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, during today's vote on the three milk reports I expressed my support for the Commission proposals, as I believe they represent steps in the right direction.

The over-regulation of the market in milk and milk products for drinking milk in the EU is both unnecessary and senseless and both consumers and producers suffer as a result. It is therefore only right that the existing rules be liberalised. It is commendable that besides the three existing categories of drinking milk, additional categories of drinking milk with other fat content be allowed. As a result, both consumers and producers will be able to exercise a greater choice. Such a development can only be welcomed.

In fact, the Commission should vigorously pursue the liberalisation of the drinking milk market, because the existing system of milk quotas is both antiquated and functionless. There is no reason to continue imposing fines on producers for producing large quantities of milk. Now, at a time when the demand for milk and drinking milk products is increasing throughout the world, milk quotas are clearly proving to be an obstacle to the development of the milk industry throughout the EU.

Liam Aylward (UEN), in writing. – The current strength in the milk sector is creating great optimism amongst dairy farmers in Europe. Growing appetites for dairy in Asia, shrinking European production and increased use of land production in the US for biofuels is driving the price of dairy to a record high.

As an MEP representing rural Ireland, I am happy that dairy farmers are getting a deserved break, although production costs continue to rise making it harder for smaller dairy farmers in particular to survive.

A change in market management mechanisms brings instability. With the milk quotas scheduled for removal by 2015, provisions need to be made to absorb volatility in the market. The reaction of the producers is unknown. An increase in output of milk will lead to a drop in prices. Safeguard mechanisms allowable under the WTO will be crucial for stability.

At present, export refunds are zero rated due to the strength in global dairy markets. We should ensure that they are retained as mechanisms that could potentially be introduced at a later date.

Change is inevitable in the dairy sector, but there needs to be a well managed transition to provide the farmers of Europe with a stable and bright future.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We agree with the line taken in the report that it is important to give an essentially qualitative boost to the school milk programme. We regret, however, that in its present form with the management philosophy adopted and with the resources currently allocated, this programme has in many cases become an encouragement to stop drinking milk in view of the poor quality and unsatisfactory nature of the products offered in relation to the tastes of pupils in lower secondary school.

We therefore agree that the range of products for inclusion in this programme should be expanded both as regards diversity and in terms of nutritional considerations and dietary rationalisation. However, we must remember that we need to solve, as a matter of urgency, simple issues such as the lack of refrigeration

networks, because that prevents schools and many Portuguese students from having access to anything other than UHT milk.

The nutritional value of milk is well known, and we know that we need to encourage people to drink it. However, in order to make that possible, aid is required to help to produce quality milk and it is the innumerable small herds that hold the key; it is in the main family farms which, by means of non-intensive dairy farming, keep the rural communities alive and the countryside populated.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), *in writing*. – (SV) The reports on milk products from the Agriculture Committee are a mixed bag. The June List supports the Commission on the point that it must be permitted to produce and sell drinking milk that is not classified in any of the three categories that apply at present. Such liberalisation is good and makes things easier for Sweden, which since 1995 has had problems adapting Swedish traditions to the EU's rigid rules on milk products.

The other two milk reports build on the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and are rejected by the June List. Milk production should be a matter for the free market, subject to normal food controls on public health grounds.

The Agriculture Committee's amendments in the report (A6-0283/2007) on the common organisation of the market in milk and milk products are simply absurd. They propose that budgetary savings that are made are redistributed in the milk sector and that a milk fund restructuring programme is set up, that support is given to those within the milk sector who are affected by increasing market liberalisation, that marketing support measures and milk promotional activities are stepped up, that support is given for milk production in mountain regions and that the scheme to distribute milk to schools is reinforced.

We are strongly opposed to these proposals. The June List would observe that it is just as well that the European Parliament does not have codecision powers in the EU's agricultural policy, because the Union would then fall into a trap of protectionism and heavy subsidies for all the different groups in the agriculture sector.

Christel Schaldemose (PSE), *in writing*. – (DA) The Danish members of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament – Mr Rasmussen, Mrs Thomsen, Mrs Schaldemose, Mr Jørgensen and Mr Christensen – have voted against not only the Commission's proposals but also the amendments proposed by Parliament. In the delegation's opinion, reform of the scheme to distribute milk to schools is necessary, but the proposal does not go far enough. The delegation believes that support for high-fat milk should be abolished completely, whilst healthy milk should receive the greatest support.

However, the delegation wishes to emphasise its support for reform of the EU's agricultural support in the direction of greater market orientation, and EU agricultural policy should be linked to environmental policy and public health initiatives, among other things.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), *in writing*. – In order to ensure the integrity of this Parliament, all Members who have a financial interest in the dairy sector should declare an interest in these votes.

- Resolution: B6-0267/2007

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I voted in favour of this resolution, as I believe there comes a time when we need to review this measure and assess whether it is really appropriate and effective. If it is not effective, we will abolish it; if it is only partially effective and appropriate, it will have to be modified accordingly. At all events, however, we should be working towards standardising implementation – that is, ensuring uniformity of checks – so as to put an end once and for all the vexation we are currently experiencing at airports.

John Attard-Montalto (PSE). – (MT) I would like to explain that there should not be any compromises as far as security is concerned. We have to appreciate that when it comes to the restrictions on taking liquids on an aeroplane, it is true that it is an inconvenience, it is true that it is annoying to have to throw away what you are carrying, but on the other hand, security is paramount; security is the best way.

If the British secret services are telling us that there is still a threat, then there is still a threat. We cannot make any compromises, and that is why we have to be very careful when adopting resolutions and approving motions relating to this matter so that we do not appear in any way weak or feeble in our attitude.

Zita Plešinská (PPE-DE). – (SK) During my regular business trips I witness annoying problems faced by passengers carrying liquids in their hand luggage at European airports. Passengers must part with their cosmetics. Fortunately they can manage to drink a half-litre bottle of mineral water but aftershave or shampoo exceeding the permitted limit will meet its end in a ready container.

Passengers see these strict airport controls as a violation of their rights. They do not know why they have to do this and are angry with the Union, with its bureaucratic rules. The purpose of their flight is different and therefore they do not understand why they have to part with basic hygiene products. Nor do the employees have the time or the inclination needed to justify the strict controls in place as an anti-terrorist mechanism.

I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution, which proposes ending the controversial measures affecting air passengers and emphasises the need for research studies to find efficient tools for the detection of explosives in liquids. I believe that the European Commission will thoroughly review the ban on taking liquids on board aircraft and – if no further facts are uncovered – it will abolish this controversial measure.

Gerard Batten, Derek Roland Clark, Nigel Farage, John Whittaker and Thomas Wise (IND/DEM), *in writing.* – Although UKIP makes the point on principle to support any repeal of EU Legislation, this is a national security issue and as such the party could not support a measure that could place air passengers and crew at risk. As HMG has stated, terrorism remains a serious and continuing threat.

Graham Booth (IND/DEM), *in writing.* – Although UKIP makes the point on principle to support any repeal of EU legislation, this is a national security issue and as such the party could not support a measure that could place air passengers and crew at risk. As HMG has expressed, terrorism remains a serious and continuing threat.

HMG's view:

HMG welcomes the TRAN Committee resolution's acknowledgement that Europe needs a high level of security in aviation. Terrorism remains a serious and continuing threat. It is currently impractical to test more than a small proportion of the liquids that passengers wish to carry. So the interim controls, pending work on a more convenient technology-based solution, represent the only present way of properly ensuring passenger safety.

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing.* – I voted for this resolution particularly because of the demand contained within it for a review of the effectiveness and fairness of Regulation (EC) No 1546/2006 (introduction of liquids onto aircraft). What I find most absurd is that I can fly into Europe with duty-free liquids – alcohol, perfume or food bought outside of the EU – but should I transit to another plane within the EU, it will be confiscated by the authorities.

Does it not occur to the Commission that terrorists probably are more aware of the Regulation than your average passenger and will therefore act accordingly? It equally implies that security at all extra-EU airports are inferior to the worst EU airport. As a regular air traveller, I find that difficult, if not impossible, to believe.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) As regards the Regulation on restrictions on the introduction of liquids onto aircraft, I believe that the adoption of the amendment – that was also tabled by our Parliamentary group – that 'invites' the European Commission to repeal that Regulation, is a positive step, since there has never been any evidence that it is effective in terms of security, nor have any conclusive facts been produced, as had been promised, by means of an exhaustive public report. Moreover, it was emphasised that if the Commission intends to present a regulation of this kind in the future, it must first produce a report proving that such a measure will be effective.

I would point out that, although the current regulation is being applied, the Commission has not even published or made available to the public a specific statement of the prohibitions and restrictions to which they might be subjected, a list of exceptions to those rules or the reasons for the measure. Nor did the Commission ensure that air passengers were fully and correctly informed of their rights, especially as regards cases of abuse of power in the application of the security rules.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – I support moves to review the current restrictions on the quantity of liquids passengers are allowed to carry on board aircraft in the EU. I voted in favour of the resolution which asks the European Commission to review the restrictions and ensure they are proportionate to any risk.

We need restrictions that are realistic and in proportion to any potential threat. We all take the need to guard against terrorist threats very seriously, but our response has to be proportionate and justified.

There is cross-party concern that the current restrictions imposed by the European Commission are disproportionately costly and disruptive. I would like to see the situation reviewed, and if these restrictions are to continue, then the Commission needs to clearly justify precisely why they are needed.

Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE), in writing. – British Conservatives fully support a review of the Regulation governing what liquids passengers can and cannot take on board aeroplanes. The way in which this Regulation has been applied across the EU has varied, giving rise to inconsistencies and manifest unfairness, and any review must address this aspect as a matter of urgency. However, we do not consider it would be right to call for a repeal of the regulations at this stage, since as a matter of principle the outcome of an expert review should not be pre-judged and protection of the public is paramount.

Roger Knapman (IND/DEM), in writing. – UKIP supports the repeal of all EU legislation. However, this is a particular measure which would put passengers and crew at risk and which we cannot therefore support.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I voted against this Resolution which seeks to repeal the existing regulation, introduced last year, that restricts liquids on board aircraft. I am worried that British Liberal and Green members of the European Parliament have now opened up the possibility of repealing this law, even though the strong advice from both the Security Services and the Department of Transport is to keep this legislation in place. While I agree with reviewing the legislation on an ongoing basis, it is both premature and dangerous to repeal the legislation at present.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) I think that the threat to the security of air transport is a real one and that the risks involved are enormous. I therefore believe that the inconvenience to passengers is proportional to what we are protecting and that the issue here is in no way a violation of rights, freedoms or guarantees, but simply a technical measure that has proved effective. I therefore consider that the European Parliament is being too hasty and over-stepping its brief in asking that the Regulation on the introduction of liquids onto aircraft should not be implemented unless new proof is produced in support of such implementation.

The precautionary principle would dictate that it is better to suffer some slight inconvenience than a disaster. The security principle dictates that we should not make things easier unless we are sure of the risks involved.

I therefore voted against the motion for a resolution laying down measures for the implementation of common basic standards on aviation security (introduction of liquids onto aircraft).

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) At a time when a large number of holidaymakers are heading back to work, it is worth thinking about some of the safety rules on board aircraft and at airports.

As a reminder, more than 16 million passengers transit through Brussels National airport each year, and since last November they have been subject to a ban on carrying liquids in their hand luggage.

There is no question as far as I am concerned of compromising security. However, a large number of passengers have complained about the way this ban is enforced at different European airports: at some, they can carry products purchased at the airport in their hand luggage, and at others they cannot.

What is more, it is difficult to impose this kind of measure on passengers if its added value in terms of security has not been proven beyond doubt, and this does not seem to be the case.

So it seems reasonable to me to ask the Commission to demonstrate the validity of this measure, and if it is proven, to provide for uniform application, in total transparency. That way, passengers will finally know which way to turn.

Peter Skinner (PSE), in writing. – I voted against this report because, whilst it makes real sense to review the impact of this measure, it is important not to repeal it. The passengers that travel through European airports like Gatwick in my region are often confused and upset with the application of this rule. In particular the way in which passengers are expected to turn over their 'duty-free' liquids purchased at an airport to the authorities checking hand luggage. The problem seems to be with passengers in transit who buy in the 'transit' airport and then attempt to check through security for their further flight. I opposed a full repeal because there are still legitimate security concerns which must be our first priority. There are also alternatives to a simple repeal which might produce better convenience for passengers and maintain security.

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE), in writing. – The current, mindless airport and aviation security measures are an unfortunate and constant reminder of terrorism. They do not instil public confidence. There have to be security checks – both on the public side and airside. But these should make sense and be flexible. Above all, they should be targeted more effectively. This means ‘profiling’, a key measure that is avoided for fear of a ‘discrimination’ accusation.

It is curious that the European Commission thinks it has to give the green light to new security measures for Europe’s airports. Governments of EU countries should co-ordinate their response – but this must not be an excuse to extend the competence of the Commission into new areas. Certainly the British Government must resist any further attempt to remove our national veto on justice and policing matters. The International Civil Aviation Organisation, with its global reach, is the appropriate body to ensure that airports around the world meet security needs. We abstained on the resolution.

- Report: Ayala Sender (A6-0286/2007)

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of the report by my colleague Mrs Ayala Sender in response to the Commission communication on freight transport logistics in Europe and sustainable mobility. We are going to be looking forward to the Commission’s report on an Action Plan for freight transport logistics in Autumn 2007. However, on the subject of logistics, it is becoming a matter of urgency to launch the debate on the ambitious European territorial development policy, based particularly on financing infrastructure (motorways, railways, airports, ports, new technologies, satellites, etc.) using the leverage of debt with, for example, greater use of the European Investment Bank (EIB), which could release nearly EUR 1 000 billion of investment potential over 10 years, public/private partnerships (PPPs), etc. An ambitious European territorial development policy based on massive investment will be one of the conditions to enable logistics operators to do their job properly at the best cost while respecting the environment.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. (SV) – There is good reason to work together to create a smoothly functioning transport system between Member States with a view to promoting the internal market. We do, however, question many individual points in this report. We do not share the view that the common transport policy is under-financed and that the EU should invest further resources in this area. We question the need for common training standards for the personnel involved in transport and logistics as we have every confidence in each Member State’s ability to manage this area satisfactorily. Lastly, we believe that the Member States must decide independently whether or not 60 t goods vehicles may be permitted. On account of these criticisms we have chosen to vote against the report.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Although many other considerations deserve a mention with regard to this report, we should like to point out, in this explanation of vote, that we cannot understand why our proposed amendment, aimed at including a mention of the outermost regions – such as the Azores and Madeira – within the definition of the priorities for transport logistics in the various EU countries, was rejected.

Our amendments, which were rejected, placed the accent on:

- *the strategic importance of public services and their contribution to the public sector in promoting economic, social and territorial cohesion, and criticism of the policies that challenge the role of the State as a provider of public services;*
- *the incentive effect of public investments co-financed by the Structural Funds under the cohesion policy, which attract private investment and the possibility of using Community funding to finance private investment where there is no public investment strategy.*

The rejection is all the more significant since the report notes that logistics is primarily a business activity, considering, however, that public authorities can play a role and act as facilitators and asking for the dissemination of best practice in financing logistics, for example, various initiatives using private-public co-financing.

A word to the wise...

Dieter-Lebrecht Koch (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) I voted in favour of this directive because it raises public awareness of the transport sector, in particular. After all, transport logistics is a crucial factor in the development of European economic growth, competitiveness and quality of life, and also reduces environmental impact.

However, in my opinion, the statements on the authorisation of megaliners are out of place in this directive, as they are short-sighted and do not go far enough. I voted in favour of the directive only in the hope that

the Commission will take up this matter in the immediate future and regulate the area separately, at which point safety, environmental, transport and logistic aspects alike will have to be taken into account. State-of-the-art knowledge will have to be utilised, as will politicians' scope for laying down a strict framework for the use of such vehicles. This could include rules on the use of Driver Assistance Systems such as brake assistants, lane departure warning systems, adaptive cruise control systems and camera monitors, or rules on steered axles and the distribution of driving power over several wheels. Finally, we must not automatically associate the term 'megaliners' with a maximum authorised mass of 60 tonnes. It should be taken into account that megaliners with a maximum authorised mass of 44 tonnes actually reduce road congestion and bring enormous benefits to the economy, transport and the environment without harming the railways, which cannot even absorb the growth in demand for transport services.

Robert Navarro (PSE), *in writing*. – (FR) While I am delighted about the adoption of the own-initiative report by Mrs Ayala Sender on logistics, which underlines the importance of intermodality for cleaner and more sustainable transport, I can only lament the adoption of paragraph 21, against which I had already voted in the Committee on Transport and Tourism.

I voted against this paragraph because 60 t goods vehicles, to which this paragraph has just opened the door, are dangerous for the environment and for the users of our roads, which were not designed to carry these loads. The road lobby's arguments are fallacious: as the load capacities of current HGVs are already underused, the reduction in pollutant gas emissions that people are trying to lure us with on the basis of 'fewer vehicles for more transported goods' is a trick. As for the impact of these juggernauts on our infrastructure, it will eventually land on the shoulders of taxpayers by causing an explosion in road resurfacing budgets.

Finally, regarding road safety, apart from the risks posed by damage to infrastructure, the very size of these road-using monsters represents a danger for all other users.

Brian Simpson (PSE), *in writing*. – Although I will be supporting the Ayala Sender report because it contains a number of good and constructive suggestions as regards the technical subject of freight logistics, I do have some concerns.

One thing that concerns me is that the possibility of introducing 60-tonne mega lorries throughout Europe is a concept that I believe to be misguided and inappropriate when rail freight is at a low ebb, and when national infrastructures cannot sustain 60-tonne lorries it seems crazy to move away from present weight limits. I appreciate that some countries already have 60-tonne lorries, which is why it is right to allow Member States to decide for themselves what their national weight limit should be. However this should not be taken as giving a green light to 60-tonne lorries per se, nor should it be seen as a kind of 'thin end of the wedge' scenario.

Sadly, Mrs Ayala Sender's excellent report has been given an unjust hearing because members and the media have highlighted just one section of it - namely 60-tonne mega lorries. It is right therefore to reiterate yet again that there will be no compulsion on Member States to introduce them on their national networks.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), *in writing*. – (PL) I am voting in favour of the report by Inés Ayala Sender on freight transport logistics in Europe – the key to sustainable mobility.

Mrs Ayala Sender has presented a very good report that provides a thorough analysis of this important issue. Without an effective logistics sector, aims concerning growth, employment and increasing the attractiveness of the European Union for investors and employees – in other words, the main pillars of the Lisbon Strategy – cannot be achieved. Logistics are an important element in the development of Europe and its competitiveness in the international arena. Logistical activities taken as a whole constitute 13% of GDP in the EU.

We should also bear in mind the enormous impact of the right logistical solutions in restricting environmental pollution, and how they help to limit energy consumption.

My view is that we should support a report that is aimed at helping to shape a plan of action in the area of logistics at European level.

- Resolution: B6-0322/2007

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, in which it says that the European Employment Services (EURES) network should become an important European labour market communication platform and a one-stop shop for workers' geographical and occupational mobility. This one-stop shop should aim to

remove obstacles, especially arising from work-related social security questions, and to extend the knowledge of workers about their individual rights. Geographical and occupational mobility is a crucial instrument for the success of the Revised Lisbon Strategy and more generally for the proper operation of the internal market on the basis of the social market economy. It is an important challenge for the introduction of 'flexicurity' approaches to employment, that is, approaches allowing greater flexibility in the management of human resources while providing the job security expected by our fellow citizens.

Françoise Castex (PSE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of the resolution on the EURES Activity Report 2004-2005 on the contribution of EURES to a single European labour market.

I believe that geographical and occupational mobility is a crucial instrument for the success of the Revised Lisbon Strategy.

In this regard, I consider that the European Commission should promote further the geographical and occupational mobility of workers through the increased budget line for 2007 in order to support projects in the area of transnational recruitment and cross-border partnerships.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The EURES network is presented as a possible European labour market communication platform, that is, as a factor which could help to encourage workers' geographical and occupational mobility. It should also help to address the present shortcomings in terms of information provided in order to avoid the horrific situations facing workers in various countries where they have to go in order to work, generally because of unemployment in their own country, as is the case with Portuguese workers.

We must improve information on social security and on workers' rights with regard to holidays, pay, sickness benefit, housing benefit and benefits for education and training. We need to ensure that the rights of workers going to work in a country other than their country of origin are duly recognised and upheld. One serious issue that needs to be addressed is the lack of controls. It is well known that workers are often required to work long hours, without proper housing, even with no contract of employment, and are paid much less than initially agreed.

These issues must be addressed if we are to achieve trouble-free worker mobility.

- Report: Foglietta (A6-0303/2007)

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) I supported the report aimed at contributing to a reduction in alcohol consumption where it is excessive and hazardous. I also support the 0.00% limit but for professional drivers only.

I am against warning labels applied indiscriminately, as I consider it non-committal, as well as falling outside the EU's competence. I believe that it is the responsibility of the national parliaments to adopt such measures, not to be applied indiscriminately, not to be populist or non-committal, but rather aimed at educating targeted risk groups, threatened by excessive alcohol consumption.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, the presentation of Mr Foglietta's own-initiative report has provoked comments that could suggest that all members of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats underrate the serious problem of alcoholism. I cannot approve of the casualness with which the problems of alcohol dependence are concealed out of reverence for the producers of alcoholic beverages and their lobbies. The protection of young people deserves better, as does the treatment of alcoholism as a serious illness affecting everyone close to the person concerned. In the end, this own-initiative report will do nothing to change the real situation.

Jan Andersson, Göran Färm, Anna Hedh and Inger Segelström (PSE), in writing. – (SV) We have chosen to support the report in the final vote. Nevertheless, we would have preferred to see stronger provisions on warnings on spirit bottles and on the risks of alcohol use by women during pregnancy. It is regrettable that Parliament was not able to support the amendments and the parts of the existing text along those lines in the plenary.

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of the own-initiative report by Mr Foglietta on a European Union strategy to support Member States in reducing alcohol-related harm. The Commission was right to issue a communication on the hazardous and harmful consumption of alcohol and its harmful health consequences. I support the recommendations, while not undermining the principle of subsidiarity, in favour of ambitious general objectives for the Member States with a view to curbing hazardous and harmful

alcohol consumption, particularly in vulnerable social groups, such as children, young people and pregnant women. I am pleased that MEPs, in their wisdom, acknowledge that the consumption of alcoholic products can be considered as a part of the European cultural heritage and life style, and that low consumption of alcohol (10 g/day) may, under certain conditions, help prevent some diseases.

Liam Aylward (UEN), in writing. – After tobacco and high blood pressure, alcohol abuse is the third most important cause of ill-health and early death in the EU, costing millions to our health service. Related road accidents continue to claim lives while related public order offences and underage drinking are on the rise across all of Europe.

The greatest tool of efficiency in decreasing alcohol-related harm is real awareness combined with enforcement. Effective education in the home and in school from primary school up is paramount.

Women and men should be better informed about the risks of alcohol during pregnancy and about FASD in particular and I support the original language of the report emphasising the appropriate warning on the package of alcoholic beverages which may prevent women from drinking alcohol before and during pregnancy. I call on the Irish government to examine mandatory labelling on alcoholic beverages targeting this syndrome.

I am very much in favour of asking the Commission to take steps to facilitate an independent study of the performance of innovative communication means, including labelling, as a way of reducing hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption.

Jens-Peter Bonde (IND/DEM), in writing. – (DA) The June Movement supports warning labels on alcoholic beverages. When these proposals return to Parliament, we shall work towards minimum labelling rules, so that Member States can legislate in line with the precautionary principle.

Françoise Castex (PSE), in writing. – (FR) In my opinion, the problems associated with alcohol abuse are taking on worrying proportions in all EU Member States.

Beyond the traditional convivial consumption of alcohol, which varies from region to region and Member State to Member State, it is necessary to remember that regular, excessive consumption of alcohol has a harmful impact on health and serious, direct consequences: road accidents and antisocial behaviour.

Consequently, as a matter of urgency we need to remind alcohol producers and distributors of their responsibilities, to ask operators in the sector to provide the necessary support, to involve schools and families, to send out a message providing young people with positive examples and to increase awareness of risks among the more vulnerable sections of society.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The report merely broaches, without going into detail, the central issue of the underlying reasons for alcohol abuse and therefore has the drawback of taking what we might call a cognitive/repressive approach based on the process of assessing the risk/threat/punishment balance.

It should be borne in mind that any addictive drug and any addictive behaviour have their own characteristics. The report mentions the need for effective conclusions to be drawn based on collected data, but it seems to embark upon a road leading towards a foregone conclusion.

Before tackling the grand question of 'alcohol and the workplace' we ought to be stressing the capital importance of role models in the formation of young people's values and attitudes. Even occupational health, which ought to play a central role here in prevention and therapeutic guidance, is seen as an extension of the repressive/exploiting arm of the employer rather than an independent mechanism for preventing health problems and promoting health.

A budgetary item should be created to fund programmes supporting workers who are suffering from workplace stress, excessive workloads, unemployment and job insecurity, directed at identifying and treating alcohol dependence, improving working conditions, preventing sickness and promoting health.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The June List has chosen to vote against the report and several of the amendments. Alcohol policy must be a national matter and cannot therefore be shaped at EU level. Each Member State has its own drinking culture which must form the basis for its citizens' work to reduce alcohol-related harm.

International advances are being made in this area, as in nearly all others, as countries find their way along different paths. By learning lessons from the experiences of other countries, each country can then develop its own alcohol strategy in the best possible way. Such institutional competition among countries is the reason for the European countries' historical successes in nearly every area. Parliament must not hamper that competition by pushing forward homogenisation at EU level.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of this report, which makes a number of concrete proposals to prevent alcohol abuse among vulnerable groups such as young people and pregnant women.

The report does not demonise moderate consumption of wine (except in the specific case of pregnant women), which is part of our culture and traditions, but addresses alcohol abuse.

I am also delighted with the proposed measures to provide more information to pregnant women on the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

Alcohol consumption, even in small quantities, is harmful to the foetus. Facial abnormalities, microcephaly, neurological problems with agitation, behavioural problems, cognitive problems or even mental retardation: these are some of the risks for the child.

Lastly, I am satisfied with the proposal to introduce appropriate communication directed at pregnant women through healthcare services.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) We would all like to combat hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption, particularly by young people, whose latest fashionable excess is what the Germans call *Koma-Saufen*, a term well understood in my own country.

I recognise the European Union's competence in dealing with public health problems and the role it has to play to encourage the exchange of information and best practices among Member States.

Unfortunately, the resolution only highlights the harmful consequences of alcohol and not the benefits of moderate consumption. Indeed, it is scientifically proven that wine consumed in moderation has a preventive effect against cardiovascular diseases, cancer and dementia. But this valuable information is prohibited on labels by European regulations.

Why warn women before and during pregnancy and ignore the effect of alcoholism on the men procreating? Why recommend higher taxes on alcoholic beverages when it is clear that alcoholism is worst in countries with very high taxes?

I would like to underline the fact that there can be no question of setting EU level blood alcohol content limits for all drivers. Zero tolerance of drivers who commit offences, whether or not drink-drivers, would be more effective in fighting the increase in the number of road accident victims.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE), in writing. – I voted in favour of the above-mentioned report and welcome the inclusion of an amendment to paragraph 16, which I voted in favour of, highlighting the harmful effects of consuming alcohol during pregnancy.

Currently, Member States may use labelling to inform consumers about the potential negative effects of consuming alcohol, and this is something that the Irish government should certainly consider. However, meaningful progress in terms of labelling can only be achieved through a degree of EU harmonisation in this area.

I look forward to the publication of the Commission's study on the performance of innovative means of communication to reduce hazardous and harmful alcohol consumption before 1 January 2010, as called for in the above-mentioned report.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I supported this report and am pleased that there will now be a real effort to tackle under-age and binge drinking. I support the recommendation also that the blood alcohol limit be as close to 0.00% as possible especially for new drivers although I realise that a 0.00% limit is impractical. I believe that alcopops must be separated from soft drinks in supermarkets and I am pleased that the report highlights this.

Jean-Claude Martinez (ITS), in writing. – (FR) It is all very well to legislate on milk, on its distribution in schools or the army, or on the creation of a new category, but the dairy sector is something else.

In the 1980s, the Commission in Brussels told us that there were milk lakes and butter mountains. As with cereals, then, a policy of 'Malthusian bureaucracy' was introduced. Under the impetus of the French Agriculture Minister, Michel Rocard, milk quotas were invented. That is, rationing, the deliberate fabrication of scarcity. For the first time in the history of humanity, people were preventing themselves from producing, and were rejecting the riches offered naturally by nature. Worse still, to be certain of achieving scarcity, we went as far as the daft premium for the slaughter of cattle.

What was bound to happen has happened. The barriers to production have limited production. From milk lakes to the Aral Sea of milk. There is a shortage of butter. Prices are rising. This shortage was organised, in the same way as for wheat.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. – Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) need to be seriously considered as a matter of urgency. FAS warnings on alcohol products, similar to those in the USA, combined with a public health education campaign are an effective way of warning of the impact of drinking while pregnant. There is no safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy and women deserve to know the facts. The alcohol industry must act as a matter of urgency.

Also, all Members who have a financial interest in the alcohol industry should declare an interest.

9. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 12.55 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC

Vice-President

10. Approval of Minutes of previous sitting: see Minutes

11. Financial instability and the impact on the real economy (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on financial instability and the impact on the real economy.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) Mr President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, as you would imagine, it is still too soon to evaluate the recent turbulence in the financial markets. We must await more specific economic data and, as you know, the Council has not met since late July, but I agree with Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the Eurogroup, when he said that for the moment there is no perceptible impact on the growth forecasts in the euro area as a whole.

The European economy has continued to show strong growth based on solid foundations. In fact this year has shown very positive results in terms of reducing budget deficits, stability of the euro, economic growth and employment.

It is against that background that we must view the recent financial turbulence that I mentioned earlier. That is all I have to say on the matter for now. I am sure that the informal meeting of the Ecofin Ministers, to be held on 14 and 15 September, in the Portuguese city of Porto, will, as is customary at those Council meetings, analyse the economic and financial situation of the European Union in greater detail on the basis of much more complete and up-to-date data.

I should also like to assure you that the Portuguese Presidency will continue the work of consolidating a single market for financial services. Also the continuing high investment in convergence of supervisory practices and constant improvement of the prudential framework clearly shows that we have not underestimated the importance of a framework which promotes financial stability.

Finally, in general terms, the Presidency is committed to continuing implementation of the Lisbon Agenda. Implementation of that agenda is the best contribution we can make to strengthening the potential for growth in the European economy and maintaining solid foundations and the Portuguese Presidency remains strongly committed in that field.

Joaquín Almunia, *Commission*. – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in recent weeks there has been serious turbulence in the financial markets, initially caused by the deterioration in the US sub-prime mortgage market.

This deterioration extended to all the financial markets via securities and financial products supported by those mortgages, which, in recent years, have been acquired in large quantities by financial institutions almost throughout the world.

If we look at corrections to stock markets over recent weeks, they have not been greater than previous market corrections over the last two years; however, what happened recently is unusual in that it gave rise to a liquidity crisis in the interbank markets, which obliged the central banks to inject large amounts of money. The liquidity problems are clearly linked to a decline of confidence owing to a lack of information on the global exposure of market operators to the products linked to North American high-risk mortgages.

The impact of this turbulence could go beyond what we have seen so far and it therefore demands our full attention and fully justifies today's debate. It is still too early to quantify the consequences of this crisis on the real economy.

The final impact will depend principally on three factors. Firstly, we will have to see what direct impact the deterioration in the North American housing market has on the overall US economy, although there is no doubt that it will be negative, and US growth will be lower than predicted up till now. Given the influence of the US economy on the wider global economy, a slowdown in growth in the United States will have some impact on the rest of the world, in particular, on European economies. This impact should, in principle, be limited, in our case, as EU countries mainly trade within the EU. Moreover, the global economy continues to enjoy a high rate of growth, thanks to the dynamism of the emerging countries, among others. Emerging countries have certainly not been greatly affected by this crisis.

The second relevant factor when evaluating the possible impact of the financial turbulence is the changes in financing conditions for businesses and households. We are already seeing a re-evaluation of risk premiums to bring them more into line with the real assessment of that risk. This is correcting a situation in which the abundance of liquidity had led to a degree of relaxation of risk assessment. This has positive aspects, but if financing conditions were to be tightened beyond certain limits, economic activity would undoubtedly be affected by the reduced availability of capital.

The third factor, which is probably the most important and most difficult to predict, will be the impact on confidence. Confidence is a key driver of investment and purchase decisions, but unlike the previous factors, it is a subjective value that is based on the overall messages, perceptions and information received by economic operators. Among others, these include messages from the public authorities, whether national governments, parliamentary representatives or international organisations.

I therefore think that this debate is a good opportunity, not only to assess the direct consequences of what has happened on the markets in recent weeks, but also to recall and emphasise the fact that the European economy continues, as the representative of the Council has just said, to have solid foundations, which should not be significantly affected by the recent turbulence and that therefore our economy is in a good position to overcome the uncertainties that have arisen.

As I said before, the global economy is still extremely dynamic, and thanks to this there is still a trade surplus in the external sector of our economy, as demonstrated by the latest statistics published by Eurostat. Investment, in particular in capital goods, remains at high levels, supporting current economic activity and anticipating future improvements in productivity. Private consumption is benefiting from sustained job creation, so that our latest statistics show an unemployment rate in the euro area and in the EU that is almost comparable to historical lows: in the case of the euro area, unemployment is below 7%. Inflation remains stable.

Thanks to all this, companies are enjoying positive results, which should enable them to cope with any tightening of credit without having to significantly review their investment and growth plans. In short, ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt that, given that one of the risks of decline which we had been warning about for some time when we published our economic forecasts – risks of a decline in the US mortgage market and its impact on the US economy – has materialised, growth this year and next year in the European Union and in the euro area is not going to exceed our forecasts given in May this year.

Nevertheless we have good reason to remain confident about the foundations of the European economy and its capacity to overcome the current turbulence. Next Tuesday, 11 September, on behalf of the

Commission, I will publish the interim growth forecasts for 2007 both for the euro area and the EU, which will give us an initial indication of the possible impact of the crisis.

On the same day I will have the opportunity to present these forecasts to you when I appear before the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. The forecasts for 2008 and beyond, as you know, will have to wait until we publish our economic forecasts in November, as usual.

Charlie McCreedy, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the United States sub-prime mortgage crisis and its potential impact in Europe have been occupying our attention in recent weeks. The European mortgage market has different characteristics than that of the United States, so problems on anything like a similar scale are less likely to arise in Europe in the near future. Sub-prime lending in the European Union is very limited compared to the United States and we have safeguards in place, such as lending rules and limits on loan to value.

The recent turmoil has, however, clearly demonstrated the interconnectivity and globalisation of financial markets. Risks have been spread wisely. This is positive. Contagion, however, is an issue. Some European banks and asset funds are exposed to sub-prime related securities. There have been some real problems, notably via the liquidity squeeze of the asset-backed and commercial paper markets.

What can Europe learn from this crisis? It is too early to draw firm conclusions, as there is too much uncertainty in the market. It is also important to react sensibly, taking the necessary time to assess the situation. Fast policy reaction is likely to be a bad reaction.

The following issues emerge from our preliminary thinking:

Firstly, the interconnectivity of markets shows how important it is to have a globally converged approach to regulation, with sound prudential rules and proper investor protection standards. It makes the Commission's regulatory dialogues with the United States and other jurisdictions even more critical. High standards of regulation are necessary throughout global financial markets, given the spill-over effects.

Secondly, questions about mortgage lending in the United States inevitably arise. While I support the notion of facilitating access to the housing market for people who would not normally be able to buy a home, with hindsight the adequacy of regulation and consumer protection will inevitably be debated. Repair is under way, but the problem will take some time to resolve.

One of the lessons from the crisis is the importance of lifetime financial education for citizens, whilst ensuring that responsible lending is enforced. In the European Union we are already looking at these issues within our ongoing work on consumer and mortgage credit and consumer education.

Thirdly, the transfer of mortgage loans, and their risks, to other parties has been at the centre of this crisis. Sometimes these risks have returned to the originating bank when their financial vehicles could not sell off or finance the bank-originated securities.

We certainly need to look closely at the mechanisms at play – that is the role of conduits and special-purpose vehicles, and their relevance for European banks.

The problems of valuation of complex securitised products and market-clearing mechanisms in stressful market situations also need further analysis. The recent market crisis has also highlighted the importance of reputational – as well as liquidity – risks as important drivers to properly assess banks' risk exposure to complex transactions.

Fourthly, what about Basel II, the new capital requirements directive for banks? Basel II provides improved opportunities to banks and investment firms to properly assess risks and to correctly calibrate their regulatory capital. So will Solvency II, which is Basel's broad equivalent for the insurance sector.

However, this does not mean we should be complacent. There will be implications that will require careful examination by regulators. For example, more work will be needed on the capital calibration of complex products and of banks' ability to identify potential problems in crisis situations, including potential concentration of risks in certain areas.

Fifthly, many hedge funds have been particularly active in the structured credit markets. Many of those hedge funds and their wealthy private or institutional investors may have incurred losses – some heavy – in recent months. That is the way markets go.

Sophisticated players in hedge funds know this. Financial markets function on risk. I do not criticise those who make fortunes when times are good; I am not going to shed any tears now if there are losses. However, the crucial thing is that hedge fund failures do not appear to have spilled over to the wider financial system. Investment fund rules, USITs, have held up. Our prudential framework and bank risk controls have, as we expected, prevented hedge fund failures from triggering wider systemic disruption.

As much as some people want to demonise hedge funds, they are not the cause of the difficulties in the market. Let us not forget where the present crisis has its roots: poor-quality lending, compounded by securitisation of these loans in off-balance sheet vehicles, the risks associated with which few understood. These are issues that prudential authorities and supervisors will need to focus on in the time ahead.

Sixthly, what was the role of credit-rating agencies in this crisis? I have already expressed criticism about how slow they were in downgrading their credit ratings for structural finance backed up by sub-prime lending. How robust was their methodology? How well were the limitations in the ratings of structural products, vis-à-vis standard corporate ratings, explained and understood?

Potential conflicts of interests of credit-rating agencies is another concern: on the one hand because they act as advisers to banks on how to structure their offerings to get the best mix of ratings; on the other, credit-rating agencies provide ratings that are widely relied upon by investors. They also concern regulators, given their importance for the calculation of banks' capital requirements.

It has been alleged that there was unwarranted rating inflation for structural products. The role of credit-rating agencies needs to be clearer: what they do and what they do not do, the extent to which they can be relied up and the extent to which they cannot. I am following up these issues with Committee of European Securities Regulators (CESR) and I intend raising them also with our international partners.

What we need are clear, robust, methodological rules and principles that are rigorously applied, and a much deeper understanding by investors of the uses and limitations of ratings and their reliability or otherwise. The scope for conflicts of interest to influence ratings must be firmly addressed. Of course, adequate due diligence by other market players is also essential. Where was it? Were firms and the professionals they employ constantly and objectively assessing the quality of the instruments they were buying and selling and the risk implications of the structures of those instruments, or were they just assuming? Did they stop and consider the viability of the underlying assets, the fraud risks, the track records of the originators and the trends in the markets? Did they question the ratings themselves and did they have access to the necessary data, both qualitative and quantitative, to do so?

I hope that the boards of all financial firms will examine their actions and draw appropriate conclusions. We believe that light-touch, principled-based regulation is the best approach for the financial sector – it has proven its value. But we need to remain vigilant and draw lessons. All parties need to take their responsibility and to take it seriously.

John Purvis, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Mr President, while the Council was not meeting, at least the European Central Bank, was at work and I think can be given some credit for having stemmed the possible further infection in Europe. Let us hope it will continue to play that sensible, reasonable and sensitive role.

But every so often it seems that it is the inevitable fact of financial life that the chase after competitive advantage will lead to excesses, which in turn lead to the predictable bust. These pressures are largely responsible also for the urge to develop these innovative financial instruments which Mr McCreevy described, and which lurk behind the development of this crisis in the American sub-prime mortgage market and its resulting transmission to Europe.

I do not see this situation as a justification for a witch-hunt on hedge funds. To some extent they have been perhaps sophisticated, or naive, victims of these new-fangled alchemies. In the same way, normally conservative but naive banks have been tempted by the enhanced interest rates paid by these supposedly high-rated instruments to go for what has obviously turned out to be too good to be true.

It seems that few operators in the financial markets, including, probably, few regulators, sufficiently understand these instruments, these credit derivatives, these collateralised debt obligations. Even less do they fully understand the potential risks and implications. So it is incumbent on the authorities both in the US and Europe – and I am glad to see that Mr McCreevy is going to take this particular aspect so seriously – that they all become more conversant with these mechanisms with their structuring and their slicing, how these slices are rated, valued, accounted, with their marketing, with their liquidity and tradability.

Innovation is as desirable in financial mechanisms as anywhere else. This must not be inhibited but, when problems of this seriousness are likely to emerge, it is essential that managers and regulators shoulder their responsibilities to understand them fully and, if and where necessary, introduce the requisite restraints.

Robert Goebbels, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (FR) Mr President, the cost of August's turbulence on the financial markets has not yet emerged. The Commission – we have just heard – is expecting a negative impact on growth. The real losses suffered by the banks and other financial players will become apparent when their annual accounts are drawn up.

According to Commissioner Almunia, we still lack information about the actual, overall exposure of all the players. The fact that those who took risks that were too great are footing the bill is a salutary principle, but behind the speculative activism of the financial world, there are victims: the families caught in the trap of mortgage lending based on the promise of unlimited growth in the property market and small investors directed to risks that were undervalued by all those living off fat commissions, including the credit rating agencies.

The Socialist group has been asking for years for increased supervision of hedge funds and all the special instruments being endlessly multiplied by the markets. As Carlo Ciampi maintains, the tumultuous development of derivative products is free from any kind of control. Even the directors of major banks no longer understand these opaque instruments. The real risks, for example the property loans, are sliced up ad infinitum, and repeatedly included in investment fund products and stock exchange instruments, with the result that nobody can locate the original risk any more.

The market expects the central banks to come to the rescue of the speculators. The ECB did in fact, in its role as lender of last resort. One might therefore ask why the ECB has had to inject more capital than the Federal Reserve into the market when it suddenly became illiquid, even though the sub-prime crisis came from the United States. Were the European banks more gullible? Did the supervisory authorities fail to do their job properly? The Socialist group demands that the Commission should learn lessons from the financial market, which has become too opaque and therefore extremely dangerous for the real economy.

(Applause)

Margarita Starkevičiūtė, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (LT) Firstly, I would like to answer Mr Goebbels's question about why the European Central Bank allocated more money than the US Central Bank. It is because the EU economy is now the largest in the world. This is a great challenge for us all. The fact that the OECD and the European Commission assessed the potential outcomes of the financial problems in the market differently on the same day surprised and saddened me. This means that the European Commission should probably adjust its economic assessment models, especially since they are likely to be based on mathematical methods. It is worrying, as forecasting economic policy is a complicated matter and the instruments used must be flexible.

What should we do now when we meet new challenges? I would not like to comment here on the problems that arise; my fellow members have done this so well. I would just like to emphasise one point. Firstly, the crisis occurred because of the aggressive monetary policy within the EU's boundaries when it was attempted to solve the problems of the Internet bubble. Thus we cannot influence various decisions of third countries. We can strengthen the dialogue and cooperation with supervisory bodies, but the European Union faces a dilemma: a global merger of financial institutions is currently taking place and it is possible that we will no longer have a single market. We will have a transatlantic market in the area of securities; perhaps we will have some other market in the area of insurance. This means that we need to decide whether we consider Europe to be a single market and require all agreements to be made at European level. Can we accept pilot projects when one of our markets enters the world stage independently? We need agreement on this, otherwise it will be very difficult to manage this crisis.

I would like to emphasise one more thing. Financial markets are under reconstruction. We ourselves acknowledged the role of non-banking institutions in the SEPA Directive. We need to admit that various Islamic banks and foundations are appearing and finally that trading networks are entering the financial market. Thus the regulation of non-banking institutions is also necessary – common regulation, which would make the rules of the game the same for both banking and non-banking institutions. This is today's reality.

The third issue that I would like to emphasise is that I am worried that we use only risky models as a basis. This principle of risk assessment has proved to be very subjective, and I therefore have doubts about the Solvency II and Basel II directives. We cannot trust rating agencies; we can criticise them, but the problem

will remain. We should trust market instruments – that is, liquidity. If we cannot sell particular securities on the market or if they are rarely traded, no rating agency can evaluate them. This should be properly understood and we need to reduce the dependence of our legislation on the opinions of rating agencies.

To conclude, I would certainly like to say that there is no need to rescue financial institutions. I can say from my own experience after the financial crisis in Lithuania that when bankers spend a couple of weeks in prison they very quickly understand how to manage banks.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Brian Crowley, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – Mr President, I should like to ask the Commissioners for their response.

The events that took place in August in the sub-prime market highlighted a number of issues for all of us. First of all, the globalised nature of the financial markets which we are now dealing with, and the issue of how quickly regulation or supervision can keep pace with the way new products are being developed and new ideas are being developed. But it also brings to mind something an old farmer in West Cork in the south-west of Ireland once said to me: there is no such thing as an oil that can make your hair grow – apologies to those follically challenged within the Chamber; there is no such thing as a pair of glasses that can let you see through clothes and, also, there is a fool born every day. The reality is that the products made available were high risk, and no matter what anybody says, the idea of *caveat emptor* is one that should have been at the very core of any decisions with regard to banks or other funds that we were going to invest in these high-risk products. It brings starkly into contrast the role of the credit-ratings agencies and their responsibility, not only with regard to the advice they give, but, in particular, regarding their informing us in a transparent manner as to whether they are representing these funds themselves or whether they are actually giving clear, independent advice.

Colleagues will remember that, a number of years ago, we discussed a directive on consumer credit, and the whole area of transparency and of having independent advice available to the consumers was one key element. Now, it is laughable that some of the biggest financial institutions in the world – and some in Europe – who are the people who spend so much money on buying-in expertise and telling us in Europe how we should run our economies, can be the ones who are now caught because of their bad investment policy.

I congratulate Commissioner McCreevy on his willingness to take on this issue and to tackle some of these areas. I also think it is essential now, not only in looking at credit-rating agencies, but also with regard to the risk that European banks are being exposed to because of the policies of some of those investments, and next week ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Alain Lipietz, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the crisis demands that I highlight three points.

First, it comes from a hardship crisis among North American national officials. It should be understood that all US officials have very serious deficits, described by what we call the US twin deficits. We have had this crisis, we will have others, either from large US companies, US states or even perhaps from the Federal Government. We should expect some more very serious crises to come from the United States over the coming years.

Second, this crisis happened in the United States in March. It spread throughout the world through hedge funds, the first two of which failed in June. It only affected European banks in late July, early August. We did have time to realise that the flames were spreading. Mrs Merkel, our President-in-Office at the time of the G8, told us to take measures concerning hedge funds, and nobody listened to her. Worse still, the Netherlands are in the process of developing a policy to deregulate the establishment of hedge funds within the country. At the same time as it is speaking against hedge funds, the European Union is encouraging their development in its own territory. This shows a genuine failure of attempts by the European Union to impose supervisory measures and prudential rules upon itself.

As a former rapporteur in favour of prudential rules and supervision of financial conglomerates, I experience this as a personal failure. I recall that we needed more than one parliamentary term to write the simplified prospectus on issuing securities in Europe. Today, one bank is not capable of reading the complex prospectus that another bank publishes on the content of the funds it is selling. That is what it has come to.

The third problem, as I told the Central Bank years ago, is that you cannot regulate the monetary system solely with measures aimed at the lending rate. I think the crisis in Europe was precipitated by the increase in the European Central Bank's interest rate at the end of the last quarter. I do not think it is enough to say you should reduce the rate by 0.5% or keep the same rate or increase it by 0.5%. We have a genuine problem to sort out, which is the reintroduction of a selective policy for lending, so that the interest rate can be set at 0% for necessary investments such as fighting climate change and can be much more expensive for lending directed at speculation.

Godfrey Bloom, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Mr President, I would like to address my remarks to the gallery, which is a lot more filled than this Hemicycle is with Members. I hope you have got your headphones on because decisions are being made here today by people with absolutely no knowledge of international finance at all.

I have been 40 years in financial services; I am a professional economist – we are talking about hedge funds, we are talking about international currency. If you want to look up the books and see what expertise the Members of the European Parliament have, I think you will be bitterly disappointed. But here we are, making decisions for global finance. Forty percent of British GDP is the City of London. We have people from Poland, the Czech Republic and Latvia who have absolutely no knowledge of these sorts of things whatsoever, deciding where we are going to go for the future in international finance.

(Uproar)

They do not understand about these things. They do not know anything about these things, any more than they do about agricultural policy, fisheries policy – the lot – but here it is.

Ladies and gentlemen in the gallery, if you want to see international finance, go to Dubai, to New York, to Los Angeles, to Bermuda. You are looking at the people down there – look at them. None of them have ever done a real job in their lives. This is a Mickey Mouse assembly, and we are going to lose the lot.

President. – May I draw your attention to the fact that when you are speaking in the Hemicycle, you address the President and the Members, while those who are taking part in the session are the audience. Please have respect for those who are showing you the respect of listening to you.

(applause)

Luca Romagnoli, *on behalf of the ITS Group*. – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the collapse of the US market in high-risk loans has caused a splash that is still being felt on the stock markets today and which has thrown speculators and savers into serious crisis.

What the US real estate operators did is common knowledge: they offered loans, which were then defaulted on, to high-risk individuals, thus placing not only the financial products but also many banks in crisis. This year a very high percentage of borrowers has stopped paying the instalments owed, placing the entire system in crisis.

In Italy, apart from the stock-market movements, it appears that the crisis has only had a slight effect on the national banking system because Italian banks, apparently, are not directly exposed to sub-prime loans. This was not the case for many German, British and French banks and that is why we are having this debate today. Therefore the least we can hope for is the opening of an enquiry into the largest international credit rating agencies on their role in these events and thus action on financial instability and on the impact on the real economy.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to tell you what happens in Italy – because loans and home purchases in my country are significant – and let me recount to you what an important Italian weekly publication, *L'Espresso*, said about the ethics of some Italian politicians (who, by the way, have also been our colleagues) in the face of the sufferings of so many savers and those who clamber to pay loans, when in fact a simple institution such as the social loan could make owning a house a reality. In the face of all this, listen to what *L'Espresso* reveals about some Italian left-wing politicians – a fact that is worth emphasising – as well as some centrist figures, but above all left-wing ones.

These gentlemen, whose first and last names and addresses are listed, benefited from exceptionally favourable terms for purchasing property in Rome. Recommendations, you may say, are a practice, perhaps an accepted practice, and perhaps an ancient practice, in my country – and not just in Italy, but perhaps worldwide.

However, when a recommendation is requested and the favour is obtained from a bank or insurance company, I ask myself, what is given in exchange by those in power?

According to the weekly publication, Mr Veltroni, Mr Prodi's successor, Ms Cossutta, daughter of one of the most radical and committed communists, Mr Violante, former Prime Minister and among the most well-known arbiters of other people's ethics, as well as Mr Marino, Mr Mancino, Mr Mastella, Mr Casini, Mr Proietti and Mr Baccini purchased houses in Rome with at times as many as 25-30 rooms at a quarter, if not less, of the market price, given these special terms by owners who, strangely enough, are banks and insurance companies.

Democracy has its costs, you may say, and as the proletariat had its costs so today does progressive socialism, which has inherited from its predecessors the ability to be specific in the pursuit of its own interests. If you are strangled by your mortgage month after month and, like me, you have the good fortune to suffer from it a little less thanks to this seat in Parliament and the activity of your spouse who now contributes, you should blame the communists, old and new, who have decided to liberalise taxi licences and the opening hours of barbers and to sell medicine in supermarkets, but have left the banks free to decide what sacrifices to impose on your families, to mortgage your futures and your lives.

You have only yourselves to blame, Italian and European citizens, if you have decided to do something other than pursue a career in one of the Italian parties that govern or have governed cities, regions and nations, and which in governing are governed by the banks.

Cristobal Montoro Romero (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioners, I would first of all like to express my thanks for the words of our authority figures regarding maintaining an optimistic stance in the face of the crisis that we are experiencing.

At the same time, however, I would also like to bring as much realism as possible to this debate, as concealing the seriousness of the facts will only lead to confusion when it comes to seeking solutions.

Firstly, we are facing a crisis that was predicted. We are not facing a surprise crisis. It was known that this would happen at least one year before, and there has been a lack of care, a lack of capacity to react.

Secondly, we are facing a serious crisis. The President of the *Bundesbank* said so himself just over three days ago. We may be on the verge of a classic banking crisis of withdrawal of confidence.

Thirdly, Europe has been infected by financial institutions in countries that have been unable to make profits because their economies were relatively stagnant, and have therefore sought profit at a greater risk. It could therefore be said that the supervisory authorities, the European prudential authorities, have failed to prevent this from happening.

The European Central Bank is therefore the first to intervene in the crisis, the one that is injecting the most money, precisely because it is in Europe, in the heart of Europe, which is now recovering economically, where this crisis could become most serious. We therefore need more clarity as to what the actual repercussions are and how major this crisis really is.

Undoubtedly the fourth characteristic of what we are experiencing, the circumstances that we are in, is, in short, the reaction of our monetary authorities, the reaction of the European Central Bank.

In my opinion, it acted correctly when it made these injections of liquidity, because what we are seeing is a withdrawal of liquidity. However, it is also true that it is paradoxical that this should happen precisely when Europe is raising interest rates in order to restrict the liquidity of the system, to restrict credit. This is a major paradox that needs to be explained properly, without the confusion that arose from the explanations given throughout August.

Clarification is essential, because we are talking about millions of families and millions of small and medium-sized enterprises, which depend on variable interest rates in Europe, getting into debt. Therefore, it is essential that we clarify the interest rate scenario and ask for caution in interest rate rises in Europe, in order to strengthen the economic growth and job creation that we need so much at this stage of EU integration.

Pervenche Berès (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, we must be realistic: despite being the powerful European legislator that we are, we will not be able to do anything about the origin of this crisis. We are powerless against US legislation that fails to understand consumer protection in mortgage lending, whether by banks or by other institutions.

Let us be realistic: we are facing a crisis of which we urgently need to correct the effects, but also learn the long-term lessons.

Let us be clear: our European citizens are, quite rightly, worried about the consequences of this crisis for the financing of the real economy. Let us be clear: our fellow citizens do not understand that, to cope with the risk-taking of a few, whose method of remuneration does not follow any economic logic, public institutions like the European Central Bank are at the end of the day forced to intervene to guarantee the liquidity of the market.

Let us cope with the situation. Let us stand where Europeans should stand, grounded in realism and proposals. In the end the Central Bank did its job as lender of last resort. However, as a supervisory body, it is powerless to find out the reality of the risks taken by the market players. We must improve the supervisory powers of the European authorities, and it is your job, Commissioner, to play an active part in this too.

Let us cope with the situation: we have been talking for many years about fair value, and this same fair value has today worsened the conditions for valuing sub-primes.

Let us cope with the situation: as regards the credit rating agencies, the IOSCO code of conduct, Commissioner, does not meet the demands of the current situation. We need a truly competitive market, in which there are no conflicts of interest and which is characterised by greater transparency.

Finally, let us be utopian and hope that the use of the financial bubble created in this way will finally start to release finance for the long-term investment Europe needs to cope with the climate and energy challenge. Sometimes utopia can be the best form of realism.

Andrea Losco (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we find ourselves in this Parliament facing once again a problem we faced back in July. At that time, some uncertainties were expressed concerning the crisis which was then about to strike the euro area. This was a crisis foretold, as indicated by the news coming from the USA.

It had already been clear for some time that property prices in the USA were excessively inflated and that the US system allowed loans to be granted too easily to insolvent persons, or to be granted at very high interest rates, and the resulting turbulence in the global market was inevitable.

Who has played a part in this game? Investors, citizens, mainly from the US but also Europeans, are suffering its negative impact; citizens and investors, savers. Thus the question is whether this Chamber, and the institutions in general, have the protection of savers at heart. Protecting savers means understanding the role played by the other operators within this framework or in this scenario, the role of the credit rating companies, which often display a great inconsistency and have conflicts which at times go unchallenged. I believe that rules and standards ought to apply to all of this.

The crisis has also highlighted a marked contradiction at a time in which the ECB has been forced to make financial movements in the market and at the same time to raise interest rates to tackle the risk of inflation. Let us hope that this situation will not persist.

The fact that this is happening, however, means that we must ask ourselves how the standards governing persons on the world stage – since this is a crisis which has once more highlighted the aspect of globalisation – ought to define the conduct of every person.

Guntars Krasts (UEN). – (LV) Mr President, the current financial instability should not have come as a surprise, but when it materialised, everyone was shocked. Insecure consumer and property loans gave rise to a growing demand for liquidity. Market corrections are occurring because for a long time money has been too cheap, and this has eroded standards for evaluating investments. A lack of confidence in the market has damaged even attractive assets, which ought not to have been subject to the downward price correction. We can now be sure that easily accessible, cheap money does not create stable growth. The foundation for stable growth is the proactive reform of systems, effective investments and markets that function more freely and more transparently. At the moment the main fears revolve around the liquidity crisis turning into an insolvency crisis. Instability that starts off in the form of a liquidity crisis can degenerate into an insolvency crisis, since market participants, convinced that their level of knowledge is inadequate, will be unwilling to lend to each other. The property crisis may create serious complications in several EU Member States, not just in the United States. Investors and depositors will not recover confidence in the financial market until they are convinced that evaluations are correct. This means that risk premiums may increase, and as a result company and household consumption will decrease. This could reduce investment movements or, in some cases, even

bring them to a halt. Europe's fiscal and monetary policy makers must be ready for this. The main responsibility for stabilising the situation will fall to fiscal policy makers. In the monetary policy sphere we can expect lower interest rates, which many European politicians have been longing to see. At the same time the market should not harbour the misleading belief that risky investments will remain. Both loan rates and demands for collateral should reduce the moral damage that such a belief could create. In the long term, the central banks need to improve regulatory mechanisms for the financial markets in order to establish greater clarity and certainty within them. Thank you.

Karsten Friedrich Hoppenstedt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the full extent of the instability sensed on the global financial markets is not yet clear. The weak points of global finance are the poor creditworthiness of borrowers on the US mortgage market and the errors made in assessing credit risks of assets and/or in auditing these. We could ask what happened to Basel II in this phase in the United States; I realise that it has not been brought in yet, but it would have been helpful.

In the United States, a mortgage volume of USD 120 billion has been adjusted up to now. This fact alone has triggered rate-adjustment shock of the proportions known. Approximately 700 billion more mortgages are to be adjusted in the next two years. Heightened investor sensitivity has exacerbated the dilemma, with confidence and the appetite for high-risk investments down. Even boards of directors of banks are now admitting that they did not know what they were doing. Lack of investor confidence and realistic assessments are currently preventing a return to normal levels – a process that will undoubtedly take some time and will not even spare the professionals of banking supervisory bodies.

Confidence cannot be expressed statistically by mathematical formulae. However, transparency builds and maintains confidence and facilitates risk control. Commissioner, you mentioned Solvency II. The risks from hedge funds and sub-prime mortgages have tended to be low thus far in the insurance sector; and that is the way it should stay. That is why Solvency II is intended to provide the right starting points and incentives.

Under the present proposals, alternative investments such as hedge funds and asset-backed securities, which are often also exposed to sub-prime risk, will be subject to own-capital backing of 45% as a standard consequence of Solvency II. This may seem high at first glance, but it provides a clear incentive for enterprises to push an envisaged hedge fund to disclose its investment to the investor. In my opinion, one principle applies here, and that is that only those who have the necessary know-how themselves should be making higher-risk capital investments.

The European Parliament has long been calling for transparency in specific financial products and mechanisms. A response by the Commission to the creation of further transparency rules for the 9 000 and more existing hedge funds is overdue. Transparency rules for credit rating agencies are also needed. A more realistic assessment of global credit risk would benefit both.

Over the past few years, European budgets and the economy have been incurring multiple debts. The sin of taking out loans at enticingly low rates of interest automatically produces imbalances between monetary and real-economy performance.

Ieke van den Burg (PSE). – Mr President, there is a lot to say about this financial crisis, but I will use my two short minutes to focus on three areas where I think we need to take action.

The first is the lack of regulation. Several members have said this already. Complex new products, and particularly the diversification and securitisation of risks, is something which is a key element in this crisis. It was sold to us as a perfect method to get rid of risks, but it is now clear that diversification has also meant a proliferation of risks and of the insecurity that is now everywhere.

The second element concerning regulation is that these operations largely take place outside the regulated market: over-the-counter activities and hedge funds, as has been mentioned already. I really think that we have to investigate where these blind spots are leading. I know Mr McCreevy does not agree, but I think it is really high time now to look into possibilities of regulation – not to over-regulate, not to panic, but really to conduct a serious study. That is what the Commission should do.

Another element is the lack of information and transparency. This has also been mentioned by several people. I want to mention the ratings agencies as well, and the accounting rules which Mrs Berès also mentioned – the fair value issue. This is linked to my third point, which is the lack of coordination and cooperation. That is an element which we have seen now in the actions that have been undertaken by the ECB, which correctly provided liquidity but did not have the information and does not have the tools to punish those who caused

the crisis. There should be a much closer link between the ECB and its knowledge and the supervisors. A very important element is cooperation and the strengthening and reinforcing of European-level supervision, which really has a grip on these phenomena at the top of the market and these new phenomena.

I have mentioned several times that we need such European-level supervision. People then tell me, even if they agree, that you have to wait for a crisis to appear because the sense of urgency is not there. I think now it is high time, and the crisis is there, so now we should act.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

Olle Schmidt (ALDE). – (SV) Mr President, this summer's financial unrest has clearly shown how closely integrated the markets are. The global financial market literally runs around the clock, with millions of transactions that affect us all. New technologies create entirely different conditions. The possibility of creating better prospects for development in investment has increased dramatically. Access to venture capital is vital here. Many new financial instruments, which some have called into question today, have been largely good and increased liquidity and investment opportunities.

During the turbulent past few weeks on the financial markets it has been shown that it is good that Europe has a strong central bank. The ECB was able to act more quickly than its counterpart in Washington and could take rapid action to calm the markets. For that the ECB deserves praise.

We still do not know how far the US mortgage crisis will continue to spread. The autumn will be crucial as new statistics emerge. Hopefully there will be a normal market adjustment without any great convulsions that might affect the regional economy, which is essentially healthy within the European Union. I hope – unlike some of my fellow Members here, obviously – that in Europe we do not overreact and think that the solution always demands more regulation and decisions taken in too great haste, as Mr McCreevy said. Despite the US Sarbanes-Oxley Act, with extensive regulation, the risky mortgages were not discovered in time. A smoothly functioning financial market requires a balanced approach, and space for new methods combined with legislation that strengthens the interests of consumers. I think that MiFID is a good example here.

For me as a liberal, openness and transparency are key in the financial markets. I would also like to see more cooperation between the EU's financial authorities to combat crisis situations and to provide a rapid response.

Mr President, Commissioners, I must make one comment: when things are blowing up around the world, it is clear that a small currency and a small market like Sweden's are hit lightning-fast. The events of the summer have given me further reason for Swedish entry to the euro.

Mario Borghezio (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the grave spectre of the debacle resulting from the sub-prime loans also hangs over European banks. Many of their management funds irresponsibly stuffed themselves with derivative products. There is a serious risk of contagion via private equity. The banks have irresponsibly palmed mortgage bonds off on institutional investors and thus also on savers, presenting them as having a triple A rating – theoretically risk-free like national securities – instead of at a very high risk of default, like negative equity loans.

Speculation, set free to lord it over the globalised financial market, has led small savers to believe that derivatives are the philosopher's stone of the third millennium. Nothing could be further from the truth. This chain of events is definitely not over and those who are really responsible remain unpunished – the hidden schemers of high finance. Here speakers have been restricting themselves to pointing the finger of blame at the credit rating companies, but why have we permitted the assessment and control of the riskiness of financial products to be entrusted to companies closely involved with and with an interest in the growth of a market that is under the intoxicating influence of speculation?

Please, have the courage to face it clearly: not only is the improper use of derivatives harmful, but the derivatives are harmful in themselves. Derivatives are to the real economy as usury is to savings and the productive economy, as a great American poet, Ezra Pound, taught us in his canto: *'With usura hath no man a house of good stone each block cut smooth and well fitting that design might cover their face, with usura seeth no man Gonzaga, no picture is made to endure nor to live with but it is made to sell and sell quickly, sin against nature. Pietro Lombardo came not by usura, Duccio came not by usura, nor Pier della Francesca, Zuan Bellin' not by usura, nor was 'La Calunnia' painted. Came not by usura Angelico. Usura rusteth the chisel, it rusteth the craft and the craftsman. Usura slayeth the child in the womb, it stayeth the young man's courting, it hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth between*

the young bride and her bridegroom. Usury is not the way to govern the world, to protect the widespread interests of honest people who work, produce and save.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (PSE). – Mr President, this financial crisis is a wake-up call for all of us and also for Commissioner McCreevy. Only a few months ago Mr McCreevy assured us that the talk about financial risks and crises was theoretical and we would never run into new bubbles. Now we have just been confronted with one, which has serious consequences, according to today's *Financial Times*, the OECD and other qualified institutions.

I have four questions for Mr McCreevy.

Firstly, if we look at the derivatives – credit derivatives, credit market – you blame the agencies and say that they are not good enough; I say that we do not know anything about what is going on. Are you ready now to propose a public classification of the complex derivatives in such a way that the public and private agencies can give us guidance on the risk connected to them? Because that is impossible today.

My second question is about the conflict of interest. If we take the prime brokers, the hedge funds and private equity funds, we see that they are mixed up in a complex set of interests: they earn income from each other, they trade with each other and we do not know what is going on. Are you ready now to introduce rules of transparency, disclosure and accountability which give us a real chance of regulating the market?

My third question concerns pension funds. We know that wage-earners and workers are having losses connected to putting money into hedge-fund speculating in this derivative market. Are you ready to introduce rules which can protect the pension funds and insurance companies trying to administer wage-earners' money in the future so that they have an interest in saving and knowing that the losses are limited?

My final question is: how can you defend the fact that the hedge funds, private equity and investment banks are the last resort on the international and financial markets without any regulations? We have the usage to regulate the banks and the mutual funds, why should they – hedge funds, private equity, investment banks – be the last resort? I cannot explain it, you cannot explain it. It is time to put the common interests at the front, and that is why we need regulation.

(Applause)

Antolín Sánchez Presedo (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, following the storm, the skies have not yet cleared, and in the midst of the uncertainty there is a demand for economic stability, financial security, growth and job creation.

This crisis is a great opportunity to take action in four major areas.

Firstly, we need to act to limit its impact on the economy as a whole. The market has reacted with turbulence in share prices and a tightening of financial conditions. The European Central Bank's response of providing liquidity was a positive one.

Financial institutions have already increased their interest rates to their clients, in anticipation of the predicted rises within a few months, taking into account the growth of the economy and the announcements made by the European Central Bank. I hope that the European Central Bank will act in a balanced, prudent manner for our economy.

Secondly, we need to act to improve risk management and economic governance. There is symmetry between a global financial services market and a national regulation and supervision system. If within the European Union we do not promote these objectives in an integrated way, we will not be able to put them forward at global level, and we will not be protecting our citizens or defending their interests.

Thirdly, we need to act to make the market more transparent. The diversification and dispersal of risk can be positive if it does not prevent risks from being controlled in the market. We need to adopt measures in order to map out financial risks.

Finally, we need to act to make the operators more responsible. Trapping people with limited resources into debt with very expensive mortgages that could even be described as predatory during a period of interest rate rises and the end of the growth trend in the property market is bound to generate problems.

The banks that relaxed mortgage conditions because of the possibility of transferring those mortgages, the rating agencies that did not warn about the quality of the securities, the investors that purchased securities imprudently and the institutions that financed them without additional guarantees all have a responsibility, and we need to make sure that this does not happen again.

Peter Skinner (PSE). – Mr President, the process of sub-prime lending has definitely been a huge problem causing the financial turbulence which we have witnessed this summer. That was clear, but what is less clear is the identification of investors and counterparties which may be, and continue to be, under stress, and that identity is absolutely vital for us to clear up.

This is due by and large, as we have heard today, to the sophistication of financial instruments which are viewed by some as akin to alchemy. However, we need to take a careful and cautious look at what to do about these and the effects that have been caused by that turbulence. Over-reaction may be equally as damaging as what has already occurred, as we find the price of credit rising as a result. This is not good for the Lisbon Process, we should be reminded.

So what has actually happened in the USA to close the door on some of these issues? It might be said that the barn door has just been closed when the horse is in the field, and that would be true to say. However, largely speaking, the sub-prime mortgage lending area was unregulated. That is a fact now which has been addressed very directly as industrial regulatory and legislative initiatives, I am told, are under way. At the same time, a high level working group has been set up under the auspices of the White House to look at credit rating agencies and sophisticated financial vehicles.

What we can draw from that is that it is vital to work closely with the United States and other global markets as we share the same conclusions about the transparency in these markets. If we do not, because the global markets are intertwined so closely, we will stand to lose so much of the benefit that could be added by the conclusions which we would have to share.

What has happened within the EU and what has happened within the US? I share some confidence now in the Commission, and of course with the ECB as well as with the Federal Reserve in the United States, in what they have done. They have helped to settle down the markets, which was exactly what we needed to do.

I can agree, however, with some of the speakers here today on calling for proportionate responses and I can maintain that in the sense of the confidence that I have, I believe that the securitisation and special purpose vehicles, which will be under scrutiny along with the credit rating agencies, do need to be opened up to greater scrutiny and transparency, that is clear, as Ms Berès has already said. But let us be clear that the sophistication of financial instruments is difficult for many of us to understand, and the role of credit rating agencies is open.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Udo Bullmann (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, as Europeans, our share of investment in the market we are discussing today is nearly 10%, or approximately EUR 300 billion. We do not know what exact proportion of this EUR 300 billion consists of bad risks, but EUR 300 billion is no trifling sum: it represents nearly three times the EU's annual budget, and the impact of the current crisis can already be felt. In my home country, Germany, the largest economy in the European Union, our expectations of future business conditions have been revised downwards. Three-month funds have become significantly more expensive, which means that enterprises that are healthy but require intermediate financing can expect difficulties.

I should like to know what lessons we have learnt from this. Almost all the speakers in this debate have mentioned credit rating agencies. As a citizen interested in the state of affairs in this discussion, I found the following on the Internet, referring to a speech given by Commissioner McCreevy in Dublin on 5 April 2005:

"Credit rating agencies will not be subject to EU regulation for the present, said Internal Market Commissioner Charlie McCreevy in a speech in Dublin on 5 April 2005. Commissioner McCreevy said he did not intend to issue specific regulation for credit ratings agencies (CRAs) but the possibility would be kept under "continual review". He warned that he was putting the industry "on watch"."

(DE) Commissioner, when will the observation phase come to an end, when will we be ready to act; when will we be in a position to cast some light into the black box of credit rating agencies, so that we are able to draw up a public scoreboard of their performance and errors? Our system is self-referential, ineffectual and clearly a legacy of previous times. I should like an honest answer. We cannot appear before the public at the

next elections in 2009 and say: we did have a Commission; it spent five years doing a great job of observing where the problem lay.

Harald Ettl (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, that was a clear enough message to the Commission. We can already foresee that the US mortgage crisis will have noticeable adverse effects here, too. The volume of outstanding mortgage loans already exceeds US public debt. Even speculation based on future property appreciation and low interest rates on mortgage loans has clearly proved to be a bubble. Now, fears of recession are being voiced ever louder in the United States. After all, eight out of ten recessions start with a property crisis. We now know that the crisis was foreseeable but that credit rating agencies did not carry out their role of watchdog. High-risk forms of capital are capable of doing all of us and the economy very great harm and thus must not be left to their own devices or to speculators. The principles of transparency and duty of disclosure, and also controls, must be guaranteed. The Commission is now required to present proposals on this.

Benoît Hamon (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, this crisis is the third major crisis in 10 years. Could it have been avoided? Mr McCreevy tells us it could. To do this, we would need to teach the poor not to borrow money when they have none.

What is the reality? US sub-prime mortgage lenders are the main culprits and players in this crisis. To increase their profits, they have turned to households in great financial difficulty. In 2006, half of the loans granted were made without a check on income. These lenders have earned money with loans that should never have been made. They have been supported by their banks; however, these are controlled by their board of directors, auditors and regulatory authorities. That has not prevented the banks from lending money to credit agencies, or from selling their customers lucrative though risky financial products on the back of this mortgage lending.

These securities, backed by the sub-prime market, were bought on a massive scale by hedge funds mostly domiciled in tax havens, which are exempt from any regulation. So it is the whole control and supervision chain that failed.

My question is simple. What serious initiatives is the Commission now going to take to prevent the rush of the financial markets to the American property market from happening with new assets tomorrow, ending up with the same results: a stock market crisis then loss of growth?

Elisa Ferreira (PSE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, financial crises are never confined to the financial sphere. The current crisis will have the effect of further restricting credit and it has already started to push prices up in anticipation, irrespective of the decision the Central Bank takes tomorrow.

The confidence of economic operators has also fallen substantially and, despite the optimism of Commissioner Almunia, economic growth is neither generalised nor guaranteed. There are even many regions with serious economic difficulties.

Today it is difficult, but I should like to know how to explain to citizens that the alarming increase in household indebtedness, the disincentive for public investment, the over-estimation of exports of goods produced in Europe due to interest rate management, among other factors, are inevitable sacrifices. That was the traditional remedy for controlling non-existent inflation. Nowadays the options are more limited for dealing with the perfectly predictable results of excessive risk taking by financial operators, and which we could not or would not regulate in time.

I think there are two conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, there is a need for improved regulation, transparency and cooperation in the financial markets, as has already been mentioned. Secondly, there is an urgent need to review the relationship between monetary policy and its impact on the real economy, families, investment and employment.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I shall be very brief, particularly since I already stated the Council's basic position on this matter in my first speech.

I should like now to thank everyone here for all the speeches and suggestions you have made and to say that I have taken note of them and of your concerns, particularly those of what I would call a more social nature, that is, the possible consequences that the recent financial turbulence might have for citizens. We shall keep that point in mind as a concern voiced by several Members.

I should like to reaffirm that we, as the Presidency and as the Council, shall continue to work on the convergence of supervisory practices and also on the schemes and mechanisms that will make it possible to constantly improve the prudential framework.

Both the Council and the Commission mentioned here that all the data available at the moment indicate that we have achieved our economic and financial objectives: deficits, economic growth and employment too are on the increase. We are remaining totally realistic about this, however and – since realism has been mentioned here – I should like to say that the Presidency and the Council will be realistic. We shall pay attention to all these matters, to the developments which the future might bring, and the Presidency and the Council, as it behoves them and where justified, will not fail to take the appropriate action and initiatives to provide a response to any misgivings and problems which might arise.

Joaquín Almunia, Commission. – (ES) Mr President, with regard to the impact on the real economy of the turbulence, or the crisis, if that is what you wish to call it, in the financial markets in recent weeks, I repeat that according to our initial estimates – we will be publishing forecasts on Tuesday – but also according to opinions that are being made public by other bodies and public and private institutions, the impact of this turbulence on economic activity, economic growth and employment in European economies in 2007 will be felt, but it will be very slight.

A large proportion of the results for 2007 are already guaranteed by the results produced in the first two quarters, by the information available on what is happening in our economies in this third quarter and by the positive inertia of economic recovery based on the good, solid foundations that we inherited from 2006.

The risks will be more evident looking towards 2008. In our forecasts in May the growth rates for 2008 were already affected by a maturing of the economic cycle and by the impact of the decisions adopted on monetary policy by the central banks. In Europe and beyond, this financial crisis, this financial turbulence and the subsequent tightening of credit conditions are going to increase or are increasing the risks of a decline in results for 2008, but I still think that it is too early to make a definitive analysis from which to draw some final conclusions on the subject.

We need to hope that, insofar as many of the factors that have been encouraging the turbulence of recent weeks are related to confidence, if we recover confidence and if we all contribute to a rigorous vision and diagnosis of the situation in order to improve confidence, or to consolidate confidence, the 2008 results will be better or less concerning than some imagine they will be.

I think that most of those who have spoken broadly agree on what led to this increase in volatility and to the turbulence in the financial markets, and I also think that there is agreement that solutions need to be found. However, the solutions are not simple, and we should not overact.

Just like good actors in the theatre, good politicians should not overact at times of turbulence. We need to do more detailed analysis and understand the facts more fully, and we need to try to seek effective solutions to challenges that exist, those that are evident, and those that we have not yet discovered.

If we look back over the debates in Parliament or the reports on financial stability by the Monetary Fund or the Central Bank, the analyses by the European Commission and our own speeches in the recent past, we did not know where or when, but we did know that turbulence of this kind could occur, given the evolution of the financial markets, and the sophistication of the instruments and techniques used by financial institutions.

I repeat what I said at the start: the European economy is still on solid foundations. The euro is protecting us. Once again it has proven its ability to protect and to absorb shocks that under other circumstances, before the launch of the euro, would have created much greater difficulties for us, both from a monetary and financial point of view and in our real economy, and, to finish, I think that the European Central Bank, in exercising its responsibility, acted sensibly and correctly in August.

Charlie McCreevy, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I shall be brief. I fully agree that we cannot be complacent about the supervisory challenges that are presented by increasingly complex financial products and off-balance sheet vehicles. Neither can we be naive and believe that Basel I, Basel II and Solvency II will solve the problems that have occurred. There are important lessons to be drawn, which I will be taking up with all concerned in the time ahead.

As I said in my opening remarks, I believe a light-touch, principles-based regulation is the best approach. I am certain that more regulation now would be the worst thing we could do for financial markets. In any event, I do not believe that there is a need for more regulation. It might surprise Mr Rasmussen to know that I agree with something he has advocated, i.e. more transparency. However, there are other ways of achieving this than through regulation.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) This debate was intended to clarify the essential issue of the moment, that is the reason for this situation of financial instability. It is not enough to identify the problem after it has already become apparent. It is even less helpful to propound remedies, which in practice serve only to alleviate certain consequences for the moment but which, in the short and medium term, will not change anything.

We all know that the real economy is based on production, distribution and the consumption of goods in accordance with people's needs, whether those needs be real, imagined or created by advertising. That means that the money in circulation ought to match that real economy; and yet the greed of those who want ever higher earnings has led to the creation of stock exchanges and speculative profits in a type of casino economy, putting the production sector in second place and encouraging financialisation of the system.

That is the root of the current problem which the central banks are trying to alleviate by placing even more money in circulation or putting up interest rates. These processes have their limitations and run the risk of creating new speculation bubbles or of further damaging the real economy, thus increasing costs for families.

12. Convention to Combat Desertification (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on

- the oral question to the Council on the Objectives for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification to be held in Madrid, from 3 to 14 September 2007, by Miroslav Ouzký, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (O-0049/2007 - B6-0140/2007), and

- the oral question to the Commission on the Objectives for the Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification to be held in Madrid, from 3 to 14 September 2007, by Miroslav Ouzký, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

(O-0050/2007 - B6-0312/2007).

Miroslav Ouzký (PPE-DE), author. – (CS) Mr President, first of all I would like to apologise to the interpreters, as I have not prepared anything in writing and I therefore was not able to provide them with a written text of my contribution in advance. I will, however, do my best to speak slowly and concisely, as the issue I am about to address is, in itself, clear.

As the Chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, I would like to commend the Portuguese Presidency for having set as one of the main goals of its programme the issue of desertification and water shortage. That is also why I particularly welcome the upcoming conference, mentioned earlier.

You are well aware of the fact that this Parliament and the EU as a whole has adopted climate change as one of the principal challenges for the period ahead and it is well known that water shortage and advancing desertification are incontrovertible consequences of climate change.

I am amongst those who are convinced that we should be preparing for the impact of climate change, rather than desperately attempting to arrest it, because our efforts in that direction are likely to fail. Today we know as a matter of certainty that Europe, particularly its southern regions, will have to cope with water shortages and soil degradation.

Climatological debates teach us that atmospheric water loss causes further desertification, which in turn is responsible for further climate warming. Breaking out of this vicious circle will prove to be very difficult. My question to the Commission and the Council on behalf of my committee is as follows: what are the practical steps that the Commission and the Council aim to take? Is it clear today what can be done at Member State level and what can be done at European level?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Ouzký, first I should like to thank you for referring to the Portuguese Presidency's programme on the environment, specifically on issues relating to drought and desertification. That is actually one of the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency and I should now like to point out the results obtained in that area at the informal Council of Environment Ministers held recently in Portugal.

I shall not read all of the points in the Presidency's conclusions on the matter. I do however regard them as very interesting and important and would therefore call your attention to those conclusions, in particular as regards combating drought and the relationship between drought and the environment, and the measures which we could and should take in order to tackle this growing problem.

I should like also to mention in greater detail the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which is also an important feature of this session; that Conference, as you know, is being held now, from 3 to 14 September in Madrid.

On 23 July the Council approved the conclusions setting out the European Union's priorities – those that the EU must uphold at that Conference of the Parties, which is the eighth conference since the Convention was approved. You will know that the Council supports the adoption, by this eighth Conference of the Parties, of the Ten-Year Strategic Plan and Framework to Enhance the Implementation of the United Nations Convention drawn up by the Intersessional Intergovernmental Working Group, and we are eager to see it implemented.

We are aware that civil society has an important role to play in this context, especially at local level, and we are in favour of that; we must therefore encourage greater participation by all civil society actors in the implementation or in the process of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

You will also know that the Conference of the Parties is to place the emphasis on the relationship between poverty and desertification to pinpoint how the Convention might contribute to combating poverty in close cooperation with other relevant world and regional actors. The Council considers that it is important to reach a consensus on an improved system for monitoring the Convention based on standards for the conservation, management and sustainable use of dry areas. Such a system will make it possible to measure past and present progress.

The Committee on Science and Technology has an essential role to play in improving the Convention's knowledge base and making it possible to adopt measures and decisions on a more sound foundation. The Council of the European Union considers that the challenges of desertification, climate change and biodiversity are complementary to one another and must be approached in a coordinated manner, with appropriate policies in order to develop synergies and make them more effective. The Council also thinks that other vitally important factors are the availability of adequate financial resources, efficient management and the financing of initiatives to combat desertification, as well as an active and efficient Convention Secretariat.

Drought, like desertification, is also a serious cause for concern. The Council is firmly convinced that these threats – drought and desertification – can be tackled effectively only through close international cooperation. The European Union is therefore pursuing its objectives in this field in collaboration with third countries. I would remind you in this context that, at its annual meeting held on 25 May this year, the ACP-EC Council of Ministers adopted a joint statement on combating drought and desertification.

That joint statement by the ACP countries and the European Union acknowledges the importance of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification for reducing poverty and for pursuing the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations.

The statement also supports adoption by the Conference of the Parties of the Ten-Year Strategic Plan and urges all the parties to work together to make the United Nations Convention more effective. We therefore think it is very important to set a limited number of priorities as regards implementation selected on the basis of scientific data and to use indicators in order to measure the progress made.

Greater participation by civil society, on the other hand, and improved communication and broader dialogue between all actors will, in our view, also contribute – and significantly so – to the effectiveness of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

Joaquín Almunia, Commission. – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the European Community has attached great importance to the role of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in alleviating poverty ever since it was signed in 1994. The Convention was developed as a principle tool to help achieve the objective of sustainable use of soil, in order to combat hunger and poverty.

The Commission still considers this Convention to be a key part of the fight against poverty and desertification; the Convention is still a unique forum, with the necessary competence and experience to learn lessons and design new approaches to tackling soil deterioration, and has achieved a great deal but, as we are all aware, there is still much to be done.

The current work of the Convention is focused on key issues in the implementation of actions, such as integration and coherence, within strategic frameworks for cooperation. The countries affected, as well as the donor countries, need to ensure that the development of the Convention is closely linked to other key development initiatives and, in particular, they need to ensure that the country concerned owns the process and runs it itself.

With regard to the European Union objectives for the conference to be held in Madrid, firstly, the Commission is particularly pleased that four members of the European Parliament are part of the Community delegation to the conference. The Convention is entering its second decade and needs to adapt itself in order to respond to new challenges and take advantage of new opportunities. This means reviewing measures that are taken through the Convention, in order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of our work in combating soil degradation and poverty.

With this in mind, the main EU objective for the Madrid conference is the adoption of the ten-year strategic plan to improve the application of the Convention, which was drawn up by a working group in accordance with the conclusions of the last conference of the parties, which was held in 2005. This plan, which is strongly supported by the European Union, represents the parties' joint, renewed vision of the strategic direction to take over the next ten years. If, as we hope, this joint vision is adopted, we will need to create an effective framework for applying it in order to maximise the effectiveness of the work of the Secretariat of the Convention and its other institutions.

Finally, this package of reforms will be accompanied by a realistic budget that is acceptable to all parties, establishing provision for expenditure that is in line with the planned activities, fulfilling very strict standards of transparency and clarity. In July, as the President-in-Office of the Council said, the conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council adopted the overall approach that I have been talking about.

Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, I am proud that in Parliament we have been able to draw up a resolution to be submitted to the next convention, which is already being held in Madrid, organised by the UN. I am proud, too, that – as I have just been informed – the Spanish Parliament has given us its permission, which is absolutely exceptional, and I thank Mr Marín, President of the Spanish Congress for this; we have a voice and we are also going to present it to the plenary sitting of the Spanish Parliament.

I am, however, quite sceptical about the subject of desertification. The European Commission's own documents show that the aid that has been given in recent years and the policy that has been undertaken has not produced the required results. Why? Because the desertification policy would require integrated systems and for all the points of view to be brought together and, unfortunately, the authorities operate separately: agriculture does not operate with the environment, water policy operates separately and, in actual fact, the desertification problems, for example the large area of land that is being abandoned, with no activity, in the case of the Mediterranean, are extraordinary.

The same European agricultural policy is causing land to be abandoned in the south, and across Europe, and the CAP is going to have a significant impact on desertification. Not to mention climate change, an area, for example, in which nothing is being done about the problem of water shortage and the melting of the glaciers, which is already occurring and is going to have an absolute effect on the situation of the soil.

I would therefore like to bring to the attention of the countries that rather than making observations, they should make specific policies and implement programmes, because it really is a question of integrated projects in which states have to tackle integrated policies and active policies. I think that everything is known about desertification, but very little action is being taken.

This is the message that we are going to take, Europe helping with this common policy.

María Sornosa Martínez, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, according to the United Nations Environment Programme, desertification threatens a quarter of the earth's land surface, as well as 250 million people and the livelihoods of more than a billion inhabitants in 100 countries because of decreased agricultural and livestock productivity.

Poverty, political instability, deforestation, excessive grazing and bad practices are factors that reduce the productivity of land. I therefore hope that in Madrid, after more than 13 years since the UN Convention to Combat Desertification came into being, the international community will debate a reform of the Convention

itself, in order to include measures that make the fight against this phenomenon more effective, especially the draft ten-year strategic plan that is being debated.

Soil erosion, uncontrolled urban development, loss of fertile land, fires, deforestation and the over-exploitation of water resources are some of the causes that explain the impoverishment of a great deal of arid, semi-arid or dry soil, and these causes are carrying us inexorably towards growing desertification of the planet, which we need to try to stop by every possible means.

We also need to remember, as the Members who have already spoken have said, that desertification contributes to climate change, as it causes the degradation of the soil and the loss of vegetation, which is associated with an increase in emissions, therefore it would be very helpful to support reforestation policies in order to re-establish and change conditions in arid areas.

With regard to the European Union itself, I think that it is essential that a European drought observatory be established urgently, something that we have considered several times in this House, as a centre for knowledge, mitigation and monitoring of its terrible effects, especially in southern Europe. Unfortunately, in south-east Spain we are well aware of this problem, therefore I propose that the observatory should be located at the European Environment Agency's Topic Centre for Land Use in Barcelona, as proposed by the Minister for the Environment, Cristina Narbona, or at the Mediterranean Centre for Environmental Studies or the Centre for Desertification Research, both in Valencia, which have focused their multidisciplinary work on areas associated with desertification, and which have broad international experience.

I think that there is an urgent need for greater involvement from the Community institutions on the subject of desertification, so that the European Union can lead the way in this area in the same way as it is doing in the fight against climate change.

I would like to close by saying that combating this problem is a major challenge, not only from the environmental viewpoint but also from the viewpoint of people and human rights: many people are fleeing their lands because of hunger and poverty, largely caused by desertification.

Satu Hassi, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FI) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, my thanks go to Mr Ouzký and the others for an excellent motion for a resolution.

According to the United Nations, desertification now affects 100 to 200 million people directly. It is a potential threat for more than a billion, and possibly even as many as two billion, people. It is not just a matter of the Sahara spreading and such similar phenomena. Desertification, the disappearance of fertile layers of soil and vegetation, is taking place all around the world, from the coasts of Spain to the plains of China. Almost a third of the land area of the globe is at risk of desertification. As much as 40% of arable land is now in very poor condition. The situation is worst in Central Asia, where three-quarters of the soil is infertile.

Climate change is worsening desertification, although until now it has been mostly local activity which has affected it, such as logging and inappropriate farming, irrigation and cattle breeding methods. Whilst climate change is making desertification worse, desertification is aggravating climate change, because less carbon binding with the soil eventually results in the carbon being released into the atmosphere. Unless we act wisely, consistently and promptly, we may create a vicious circle.

Combating desertification entails the prevention of hunger and, through that, the prevention of conflict. Last June the UN warned that over the next 10 years desertification could drive 50 million people from their homes, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. This would also mean more people trying to enter Europe illegally.

The Darfur crisis has been described as the first climate change conflict. The water shortage is just one aspect of the crisis. It is more generally recognised that the prolonged water shortage and the decline in the land's productivity have helped fuel conflict.

As stated in the resolution, there needs to be investment in sustainable land use. Measures to prevent desertification will be a lot cheaper than its consequences. A cautionary example on a small scale is the Easter Islands. There was a flourishing culture there at one time, but when the forests were cut down the soil became poor, the islands turned into dry grasslands, and a thriving culture collapsed in a short space of time. If we act wisely, consistently and determinedly, we can stop all humanity suffering the same fate.

Roberto Musacchio, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this eighth conference on desertification is an extremely important opportunity, in a proper forum such as the UN, but it also requires specific responses to a dramatic situation.

Climate change is accelerating processes already under way affecting very fragile areas such as Africa, but not sparing our own continent. Hunger and disease, migrations of biblical proportions and fires are our future, but also our present.

We therefore need to make strong, clear choices. The first is, naturally, to implement Kyoto and to sign, at long last, the post-Kyoto agreement, a multilateral agreement providing the frame of reference for a different future. Further choices are also needed so that we can adapt in order to protect lives. There is a real tragedy: its name is water. The right to access to water is already being denied and is likely to be denied more and more for millions of people.

For this reason, we should oppose processes to privatise this resource, which is vital for life. Access to water should be guaranteed and it should become a genuine common asset belonging to humanity, including through a solemn declaration by the UN that would subsequently make it possible to put in place public policies to guarantee such a right.

It is also necessary for the fight against desertification to guide financial policies on climate. For example, all good practices that allow CO₂ capture through agriculture and forestry ought to be promoted and encouraged. This ought also to lead to a review of choices such as those in the common agricultural policy, which have encouraged a decoupling of productive activities carrying with it a risk of desertification and fires. Choices such as intensive production of biomass for energy ought also to be reconsidered.

In Europe too, it is also necessary to have a specific, strong policy relating to soil, as for water and air. For this reason we must not erect obstacles, as is being done in this Parliament by a section of the European People's Party, but instead the framework directive on soil protection put forward by the Commission should be welcomed. It provides that soil should form an integral part of climate policy. Desertification is also caused by a dearth of policy. We must combat it with good policy.

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, there are areas within the European Union that fall victim to long periods of drought and its devastating impact every year or every few years; it is good therefore that this is being taken into account in policymaking. In fact, there are two causes of desertification: one natural and one man-made. Drought is a natural cause that can lead to poor soil condition, particularly in combination with man-made causes such as poor management of agricultural land, forests and water. The risk of desertification then increases hand over fist, particularly in Europe's Mediterranean regions. Now that many climatologists are predicting an increase in temperature, with an increased risk of extreme drought, it is good to take preventive measures to limit the impact of drought, including desertification.

In my view, policy must be targeted at both the natural and the man-made causes of desertification. As regards the natural causes, it is important to use the available water as effectively as possible. Water must be conserved where possible, and soil must be prevented from drying out. One way of achieving the latter is to ensure good forest management. Good water management is also important.

Existing legislation on water can also be employed here. My home country, the Netherlands, has a national coordination centre, which comes into operation as soon as drought threatens, and implements measures at regional level. Frameworks can be laid down at European or UN level, but implementation must take place primarily at national and regional level.

Voluntary partnerships between problem areas with a view to learning to deal with the problems strike me as another effective possibility. These can take the form of a knowledge platform with both political and scientific input. Such initiatives also exist in connection with the implementation of the Directive on the assessment and management of flood risks, and appear to be having a positive impact.

Roberta Alma Anastase (PPE-DE). – (RO) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, global warming is a threat whose long-term effects are devastating. This summer we witnessed the effects of the heatwave in Greece and other European countries, floods in Great Britain and extreme droughts in Romania.

Global warming effects became more and more visible for Romania in Dobrogea, Southern field or Western sands. Following global warming, Romania will be, together with Spain, Greece and Italy, among the countries

facing climate change the most by 2015. Almost a quarter of Romanian territory will become arid in the next 20 years and many plant species will disappear.

The effects of desertification are already visible. The situation in Romania is not unique in the European Union and that is why we have to act together based on the principle of solidarity which the European project is founded on.

Assessments 10 years after the entry into effect of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, indicate increasing desertification trends while the reaction of states is absent. If no measures to eliminate the negative factors are taken, desertification will be present forever or the costs for environmental remediation will be incommensurate.

Dear colleagues, preventing desertification is easier than removing it. Efficient crop management, increased attention to irrigation systems and drawing up strategies for ensuring workplaces in non-agricultural fields for the inhabitants of dry areas could represent solutions for preventing desertification.

In order to ensure the efficiency of the efforts in combating desertification we need integrated development systems at national, regional and international level. Meanwhile, Convention implementation has to be closely linked to the efforts of limiting climate change.

Having regard to the abovementioned points, I would like to ask a question to the Commission: at the Conference in Madrid, will the Commission announce a change or a toning of the strategy and undertake new obligations on behalf of the EU as regards the Convention, having regard the accession of the most recent countries?

Edite Estrela (PSE). – (PT) The Green Paper on climate change draws attention to the natural phenomena aggravated by climate change.

Climate change is expected to lead to a reduction in rainfall, higher temperatures and a higher incidence of heat waves and periods of drought, leading to increased desertification. Unlike other natural disasters, the impact of drought does not affect infrastructures but production and the environment, as well as the lives of local people.

One of the serious consequences of drought is the difficulty of supplying the population with drinking water. Studies show that droughts and floods kill more people than any other natural disaster. Moreover, 8 million people die each year from diseases linked to the consumption of unsafe water, for example because of dysentery, cholera and typhoid fever.

Shortage of drinking water causes 80% of illnesses and deaths in developing countries. More than 4 500 children die each day of diseases caused by lack of water. It was not by chance that the Informal Meeting of Environment Ministers, held in Lisbon a few days ago, was devoted to the problems of water shortage and drought, which is, moreover, one of the major concerns and priorities of the Portuguese Presidency's Programme for the environment, as the Secretary of State already mentioned. It is hoped that the Conference of the Parties will take the appropriate decisions for combating drought and desertification and that the European Institutions will also make their contribution.

In conclusion, I should like to recapitulate the proposals which I put forward in the report on natural disasters, in particular those adopted by the European Parliament: the establishment of a European observatory on drought and desertification in order to gather information and ensure a more effective response; that preventive measures be implemented in the area of drought risk management, including strategies to minimise the resulting impacts, and incorporated into river basin management strategies.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllidis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, it is one of life's little ironies that this discussion should take place after the summer's tragic events in southern Europe. These disasters will unfortunately play a major part in changing the landscape and creating future environmental problems.

Desertification is not a modern problem; it has been with us for decades. In the past, the gradual deterioration of fertile soil has been a complex process. It has multiple causes and proceeds at varying rates according to climatic differences.

For example, desertification may intensify an existing general climatic tendency towards greater dryness, or it may initially arise from a change in the local climate. It is important to stress that the presence of a nearby

desert has no bearing on desertification. Unfortunately, an area undergoing desertification only comes to the public's attention once the process is well under way.

There is often very little information available to indicate the previous state of the ecosystem or the degree of degradation. We therefore need to be particularly careful about what is to be done with the burnt land in southern Europe: in the near future there is a danger of climate change, which could well cause desertification in the stricken regions.

Scientists also happen to be investigating whether desertification is a permanent factor in the process of global change, and how and when desertification can be stopped or reversed. This will be one of the topics for discussion at the United Nations International Conference.

More efficient use of existing water resources and control of salinisation are effective tools for areas of dry soil. There are also ways of using surface water resources such as rainwater.

In addition to science, politics can be considered as a useful tool for combating desertification. If we are to halt and reverse the degradation of dry and semi-barren soil, we must understand how and why the rate of climate change, population growth and food production affect these environments.

The most effective intervention arises only from the prudent use of the best information. As a conclusion to this discussion, a resolution on the European Union's aims has been submitted to the United Nations Conference.

Let me emphasise two points which I consider to be very important. First, it is finally time for the EU to fork out, if it wishes to call itself the 'European Union'; it must assign legally binding funding to actions to combat desertification. Second, the EU should not rob Peter to pay Paul: it cannot present itself as protector of the environment having failed to promote mandatory general regulations prohibiting the import into the EU of illegal timber that has not been sustainably felled.

Indeed, desertification concerns not only the European Union, but the whole planet. If, then, the EU wishes to make its presence felt, it must take appropriate steps, and not go to Madrid merely as an observer.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I seem to have detected in this debate a certain sadness, a certain consternation and perhaps a little scepticism on the part of some Members as to what we can do from now on to combat drought and desertification, having regard to what we have done to date in this field.

However, I think that the conditioning factors and the context have changed significantly since 1994, particularly in more recent times. I think that the growing awareness among governments, politicians in general, civil society and public opinion of issues concerning climate change, the environmental challenges facing us and, in particular, combating desertification, climate change and water shortages, will help us to press ahead, with confidence, optimism, and a renewed impetus in combating the serious environmental problems that we shall increasingly have to face.

We also have reasons for some confidence and optimism when we see the Council of the European Union taking on important commitments, I would even say extremely important commitments, and taking the lead internationally in announcing measures for combating climate change and proposing that they become standards, goals to be achieved by the entire international community.

Portugal, in its Presidency of the European Union, will naturally have an important role to play here too, since we shall be leading the European Union at the Bali Conference which, as you know, will be preparing the decisions that we shall need to take in that area post-Kyoto 2012.

We think that the Madrid Conference of the Parties to the Convention to Combat Desertification could in fact provide an opportunity for renewing and updating the commitments made in 1994. We hope so. We have three or four priorities that we think it would be useful to achieve.

First, it is our opinion that the Parties to the Convention should improve their internal coordination as regards combating desertification, by taking a more integrated approach to this issue as a whole. As the honourable Member mentioned, ministers for the various sectors often adopt domestic measures without previously agreeing on the objectives to be attained, so that decision-making is rather ad hoc and random. At national level, therefore, coordination between the various departments holding responsibilities in this area needs in fact to be more effective and more efficient.

It was mentioned in this House, and I also said it myself in my first speech, that it is very important for civil society to feel more involved in implementing the measures needed to combat desertification. Many of the problems are specific and localised, having a profound effect on the local population, and it is important in this combat that there should be a sense of 'ownership' or taking on board of the policies necessary to combat desertification.

We must also enhance the institutional mechanisms for implementing the Convention. We also think it is important, at regional and international level, to step up such cooperation as well as cooperation to combat desertification. The Parties to the Convention frequently tend to view their own problems from an exclusively national point of view. This is one area where it seems to us, by the very nature of the problems involved, that regional and international cooperation are particularly appropriate.

To conclude, the question of the budget was mentioned here – budgetary appropriations. It is an important point; naturally we must also allocate sufficient financial resources to enable these mechanisms to meet needs.

The establishment of a European observatory on drought was mentioned. That was in fact one of the points discussed and debated at the informal meeting of Environment Ministers in Portugal and one could conclude from that debate that they regard the establishment of a European observatory on drought as an important measure both to draw attention to drought-related problems as well as to build the model required for the measures which must be, or could be, implemented in order to combat drought. This is therefore, as I said, a measure that the Environment Ministers view with interest and enthusiasm.

Let us hope, then, that the Madrid Conference will produce results that come up to our expectations.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, it has been a very interesting debate, in which I would like to point out that five women and three men spoke. I think that this is very important and that it shows that our female Members are particularly sensitive regarding such a fundamental issue.

To conclude the debate, I have received seven motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾ pursuant to Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon.

(The sitting was suspended at 5.15 p.m. pending Question Time and resumed at 5.30 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

13. Council Question Time

President. – The next item is Question Time (B6-0138/2007).

The following questions have been submitted to the Council:

Question No 1 by **Manuel Medina Ortega** (H-0517/07)

Subject: Global approach to immigration

In the light of the conclusions of the General Affairs Council held in Luxembourg on 17 and 18 June 2007 concerning the extension and consolidation of the global approach to immigration, as well as the problems posed by the implementation of permanent intergovernmental cooperation measures in this field, what measures could the Council envisage with a view to developing more effective Union policies, including, notably, real decision-making powers for the Commission or Frontex in such matters as establishing pilot association projects?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (PT) The EU institutions implement the series of measures envisaged in the Council conclusions of 18 June 2007 within the limits of their competence as

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

conferred upon them by the Treaty, in cooperation with the Member States and, whenever appropriate, with the third countries concerned.

The responsibility for the control and surveillance of external borders falls to Member States. However, it is of interest to all Member States belonging to the Schengen agreement, not merely those which have external borders, to ensure that external border controls are effective; certain measures have therefore been taken to promote solidarity and cooperation between Member States in this area.

The establishing of a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union, an agency generally known as Frontex, by Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004, was an important step in promoting that solidarity.

In the same way, the capacity of the Frontex Agency was further strengthened with the adoption on 12 June this year of the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a mechanism for the creation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams as well as the setting up, during 2007, of the centralised record of available technical equipment – known as the ‘toolbox’ – kept by the Member States and able to be made available to other Member States.

Joint operations and pilot projects are launched with the agreement of the Member States concerned. The Rapid Border Intervention Teams are set up in response to a request lodged by one or more Member States. Frontex coordinates those activities.

There are no plans at present to extend the scope of the decision-making competence of the Commission or of Frontex in this context. Furthermore, the approval of Decision No 574/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the External Borders Fund for the period 2007 to 2013 as part of the General programme ‘Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows’, is another important step for the promotion of solidarity and will establish a new means of extending financial aid to the Member States that apply the provisions of the Schengen Agreement at their external borders.

Manuel Medina Ortega (PSE). – (ES) President-in-Office, thank you very much for the information you have given me. I am aware of the constitutional limitations on the development of these cooperation measures as well as the resistance of many Member States to taking on greater commitments, but we always run the risk that the European Union’s words will not be confirmed by the facts, and specifically in the functioning of the Frontex mechanism. As a result of the strictly intergovernmental and voluntary nature of the cooperation, often the European Union’s words are just words, in other words, a programme starts to operate and is interrupted because, either governments have not supplied the material resources, or, having offered them, they withdraw them, which means that we end up with repeated statements that really disappoint the public, announcing the withdrawal of funds once the operation has started or after very limited or short periods.

I hope that the Presidency will encourage the consolidation of a system that will give greater permanency to this type of operation.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) I understand your concern. In any case we must, I think, here too, take a positive view of the progress made. If we bear in mind where we have come from and where we were, the establishing of the Frontex Agency is, in my view, already progress and a step forward in cooperation within the European Union on matters concerning the management of external borders.

We may, as you say, develop the capabilities and competences of Frontex, if the Member States so wish. However, a word applies here too I think, and it is not an intergovernmental word, but a fundamental word, a word, I would say, on which our Union is founded – and that word is solidarity.

We must rely, here too, on that solidarity, solidarity with the Member States who might at one time or another have need of it. That word – there is no substitute for it – is a word denoting not an intergovernmental situation, but rather union.

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) President-in-Office, I should like to be more specific. The idea of Frontex is excellent, but the implementation is poor. One reason for this is that the Member States are not providing the staff or equipment they have promised. Mr Frattini has found that only 10% has been provided. I should like you to tell me – and Parliament – how many of the staff and which technical equipment promised by which Member States has actually been supplied to date and what is still outstanding, and what action you

envisage to ensure that all Member States finally provide what they have promised, to enable Frontex to function all year round.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council* – (PT) I also understand the honourable Member's question. We must bear in mind the commitments we have made within the Frontex area, whether in terms of equipment, funding or personnel, and we must stand by our commitments, and I would point out that the Presidency has not omitted to call attention to those aspects.

If we are failing to deliver on the commitments, then we must put that right as a matter of urgency. That is the only way to enable the Frontex Agency to effectively exercise the role and competences allocated to it.

Paul Rübig (PPE-DE). – (DE) I should be interested to hear whether the involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises has been considered – after all, these make a substantial contribution to employment in Europe. I should also like to know the extent to which – as has been seen in the United States – female employment, in particular, has added measures to the Lisbon agenda. Has the Council taken any relevant precautions to integrate workers accordingly?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I should like to say that, as regards the management of the Frontex Agency and the more general issue of immigration, the basic goals of the Portuguese Presidency are to combat illegal immigration more effectively and improve the adaptation, integration and quality of life of those working in our midst and contributing legally to our economic and social development.

The Portuguese Presidency has various initiatives in view on this aspect. We shall keep in mind the measures that are fundamental and essential in this area as regards our relations with third countries. Immigration will always be on the Presidency's and the Council's agenda in their dialogue with third countries.

President. – Question No 2 by **Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou** (H-0520/07)

Subject: Updating of labour legislation in respect of gender equality

What differences in treatment between men and women has the Council identified in respect of gainful employment?

What is the geographical distribution of such differences in the Member States?

What contribution will the Council make, in the context of discussions to update labour legislation, to combat discrimination so that men and women have access to quality jobs offering flexibility and security?

Is it possible to agree on safeguard clauses for the protection of maternity and the reconciliation of work and family life in the private sector?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) As regards the differences in treatment between men and women in respect of gainful employment, basic legislation has already been approved, including certain directives which provide for equal treatment as regards pay, job access, professional training, promotion and working conditions.

Furthermore, the Commission and Eurostat are responsible for monitoring the situation in this sector in the various parts of the European Union. It is clear that, in order to formulate policies, there is a basic need for high quality data covering the whole of the European Union. Here I am very pleased to recall the agreement reached recently between the Council and the Parliament on the setting up of the European Institute for Gender Equality, which will operate precisely in that area.

On the subject of updating labour legislation, the Council can take action only on the basis of a legislative proposal from the Commission. Nevertheless, the Council is also applying more open methods for coordination under the European employment strategy. In this policy area our attention is currently focused on the recent Commission communication on flexicurity, which specifically mentions gender equality as one of the possible joint principles to be agreed at the European Union level.

We also welcome the fact that the Spring 2007 European Council agreed to set up a family alliance to serve as a platform for exchanging opinions and knowledge on good practices and policies for families.

As regards the question of introducing safeguard clauses for the protection of maternity and the reconciliation of working and family life in the private sector, I am pleased to mention the important directives already approved in the field of maternity leave and the protection of maternity and new-born infants at the workplace.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I would like to thank the President-in-Office of the Council for reiterating the measures which, as we know, have been taken in the interests of equality. I am asking about the positive discrimination in the legislation of some Member States. For example, lower pension thresholds are provided for mothers; will this be condemned today by the European Commission, which is taking those Member States to the European Court? Is the Council going to decide in favour of such positive discrimination?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) A careful reading of the programmes of the German, Slovenian and Portuguese Presidencies will show that social issues, specifically issues of gender equality and the protection of the family, are very high on our list of concerns.

In cooperation with the Commission and each within our own sphere of responsibility we shall, of course, be presenting measures that may be more favourable and may in fact reflect our concerns on social matters. Those concerns are essential in a modern society such as the EU, taking account of the respective competences of the EU and the Member States.

Let me assure the honourable Member that social issues, in particular those concerning the protection of the family, are priorities for all three Presidencies and, in this specific case, for the Portuguese Presidency. I hope that by December we shall not have disappointed her in this area.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) As far back as 1975 the European Union adopted legal acts prohibiting discrimination in the provision of salaries and requiring that men and women were paid equal salaries for equal jobs. Already 30 years have passed, yet these legal acts have not yet been implemented. I would like to ask the Council to present its opinion. Can Member States themselves choose which acts they will implement and which they will not? What is the situation in Portugal?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) Once again I should like to point out here what falls under the competence of the EU, namely policy and legislation, and what is the responsibility of Member States – this must be taken into account – and I should like to say that gender equality is an essential issue for Portugal.

I must say also that, in the EU and in this particular case in the new Reform Treaty – as already reflected in the Constitutional Treaty – equality for us is a basic and fundamental issue in European integration and is part of the *acquis* of those fundamental principles that will certainly always be at the forefront of our concerns.

President. – Question No 3 by **Chris Davies** (H-0523/07)

Subject: Palestine

What is the Council's current position regarding direct communication with elected representatives of the Palestinian people serving in the administration in Gaza?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) I would remind the House that the Council, in its conclusions of 23 and 24 July 2007, reiterated its full support for President Abbas and the Government led by Prime Minister Fayyad.

The Council reaffirmed its position on events in Gaza: the only way to achieve Palestine's national objectives by peaceful, legal and democratic means is through reconciliation and national unity based on the peace programme devised by President Abbas.

The Council also stated that the EU is opposed to any division whatsoever of the Palestinian territories and confirmed that the EU is ready to collaborate with all Palestinian parties whose policy and actions reflect the principles of the Quartet.

The EU resumed relations with the institutions of the Palestinian Authority. We began providing direct financial and technical aid to the Palestinian Government. In its conclusions of 23 and 24 July 2007, the Council reaffirmed its pledge to help establish the institutions and economy of the future Palestinian State and stressed the need to develop the economy fully in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, including by promoting cooperation with Palestine's private sector.

The Council confirmed its support for the Palestinian civil police by remobilising the EUPOL COPPS mission. The Commission also called upon Israel to provide the conditions required for such a mission.

Chris Davies (ALDE). – The policy of the European Union has been, ever since the Palestinian elections, to refuse to talk to elected representatives associated with Hamas. Every time Hamas has made a small step that might be interpreted as being in our direction, we have slammed the door in its face.

From talks I have had with some of the President-in-Office's colleagues in Lisbon, I know that there are members of his Government who believe that this policy has been a disastrous failure. But, in this instance, his job is to talk on behalf of the Council and defend the indefensible. Can he tell the House in what ways the Council believes that its policy has proven a success?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) I would point out that the Middle East peace Quartet met recently in Lisbon. We are confident and believe that we shall be able to devise measures within the scope of the Quartet, and also within the scope of the European Union, that can help make progress with the Middle East peace process. The situation there has remained unchanged for many years and we know it is a complex and difficult situation that cannot be resolved overnight.

However, we think that the political conditions might now be in place to enable us to make positive progress. The Portuguese Presidency wants to work towards that, as does the Council of the European Union.

We need to seize the moment and grasp the opportunity. We must take advantage of the political context and make the most of the sense of urgency to solve this problem, which I think we feel is there at the moment in relation to the Middle East peace process. We must be realistic yet confident and we must not think of giving up.

David Martin (PSE). – Let me rephrase Mr Davies' very good question. Does the Council believe we can make progress in the Middle East without bringing Hamas to the table? Unless Hamas is involved in discussions, the Quartet can meet all they want but there will be no solution. Does the Council accept that some day it is going to have to sit face-to-face with Hamas to solve this situation?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) As you know, the Council agreed upon principles and policy lines for the Middle East peace process that it intends to uphold; it believes in those principles and in those policy lines that shape its political action, and it is intending to stick to them.

President. – As the author is not present, Question No 4 lapses. Question No 5 by **David Martin** (H-0526/07)
Subject: Aid for trade

The Finnish and German Presidencies are to be congratulated on the priority they assigned to aid for trade.

What steps will the Portuguese Presidency take to ensure that spending on trade-related assistance from the Commission, and in particular Member States, continues on the correct trajectory toward the target of €1 billion annually by 2010? Indeed does the Presidency have, or will it seek, clarification of the individual countries' financial commitment toward the €1 billion target?

How will the Portuguese Presidency ensure that the Member States and the Commission deliver adequate assistance in those aspects of aid for trade identified by the WTO aid for trade taskforce in 2006, such as trade-related adjustment and trade-related infrastructure, which fall outside of the definition of trade-related assistance and therefore outside of the €2 billion target?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) The Portuguese Presidency is firmly determined to continue the work successfully undertaken by the Finnish and German Presidencies and to implement the conclusions on aid for trade approved by the Council on 15 May 2007, in particular as regards the finalisation of the EU aid for trade strategy in time for it to be included in the WTO's next global evaluation of aid for trade due to take place in November 2007.

One of the Presidency's objectives is actually to reach an agreement on EU aid for trade strategy at October's General Affairs and External Relations Council, including an outline of the specific steps envisaged for attaining the EUR 2 billion agreed for trade-related assistance by 2010, notably the EUR 1 billion from the Member States to meet the needs identified by the developing countries.

The Presidency is confident that that will be achieved. The strategy also aims to make a contribution to the broader agenda of aid for trade and to the definition of the measures to be implemented.

Therefore, on 5 July 2007, the Portuguese Presidency presented a draft EU aid for trade strategy which is under discussion in the relevant Council formations. The draft strategy should be seen in the context of following up the recommendations put forward in 2006 by the WTO Aid for Trade Task Force.

David Martin (PSE). – I am very encouraged by the President-in-Office's response and wish him well for the October meeting. I hope he gets a successful package.

If he does, will he consider publishing towards the end of this year how much each of the individual Member States has contributed in the form of aid for trade? We know the Commission EUR 1 billion is very transparent, and it is very obvious how it is being spent. It is not so clear where the EUR 1 billion from the Member States is supposed to come from, whether this is actually happening and who it is coming from. Would the Council consider publishing that in November or December?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) I thank the honourable Member for his words of encouragement and confidence. The Presidency and the Council will take the appropriate action on this matter in line with the applicable practices, conditions and legislative provisions.

President. – Question No 6 by **Esko Seppänen (H-0527/07)**

Subject: Northern dimension policy

The Portuguese Presidency of the Council has stated that it will seek to promote EU cooperation with the Mediterranean countries. As the EU also has a northern dimension, how will the Council Presidency simultaneously promote the EU's northern dimension policy and its implementation?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) We have been implementing the northern dimension policy since the beginning of this year on the basis of two documents adopted at the Northern Dimension Summit held in Helsinki in November 2006.

The policy framework document and the political statement adopted in Helsinki represent a turning point for the northern dimension, insofar as they turn the policy into a joint policy shared by all the northern dimension partners, that is, the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland. Joint acceptance of the new policy is a key objective and includes Russia's full participation in all northern dimension structures and activities.

The other main participants and actors in the northern dimension, in particular the four Northern Regional Councils and the international financial institutions, will also be involved in the process. The northern dimension now represents a permanent platform for debating northern issues and concerns.

The Portuguese Presidency will certainly take work forward in this area. A Steering Group meeting is planned for late September, early October in Reykjavík. The Steering Group aims to provide continuity between the ministerial meetings and the Senior Officials' meetings. A meeting of Senior Officials is scheduled during the Portuguese Presidency, to be held on 21 November in Russia.

As a Mediterranean country, Portugal would like to see a more intense and broader political debate with our partners from the southern shores of the Mediterranean within the context of Euromed. The EU and Euromed countries share common interests and are facing similar challenges.

It is in our own interest to broaden EU cooperation with those countries, especially with regard to tackling migration flows and social development. At the same time, we shall continue to work on implementing the new northern dimension policy. As in the case of Euromed, a great deal could be achieved through practical cooperation based on good neighbourliness, a partnership of equality, joint responsibility and transparency.

Esko Seppänen (GUE/NGL). – (FI) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Russia's role is crucial in the development of the Northern Dimension. The European Union's relations with Russia are important in that respect. Does the Presidency have any intentions this autumn of promoting talks with Russia on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) As you know, during its term of office the Portuguese Presidency is to organise a summit with Russia to be held in Mafra, a town not far from our capital, Lisbon. We are hoping to consider during that summit all the issues pertaining to cooperation and EU-Russia relations, within the economic, scientific, and cultural fields as well as fields directly concerning the freedom of movement of persons in the European area.

We regard it as important and strategic to establish a mutually advantageous and beneficial relationship with Russia based on shared principles and values.

President. – Question No 7 by **Bernd Posselt** (H-0530/07)

Subject: Frontex

What has been the Council's experience over the last few months with Frontex, and what is its opinion of the idea of developing it into a real European border service, based on the German border police?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (PT) The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union, known as Frontex, set up by Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004, which I mentioned earlier, is intended to improve integrated management at the EU's external borders.

The role and functions of the Frontex Agency are set out in the Regulation, which takes account of the fact that the Member States retain responsibility for the control and surveillance of external borders. The powers of the Frontex Agency were strengthened recently by the approval on 12 June 2007 of the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a mechanism for the creation of Rapid Border Intervention Teams.

The European Council, in its conclusions of June 2007, welcomed the agreement reached on Rapid Border Intervention Teams and the launching of the European patrol network and the creation of a centralised toolbox of technical equipment to be made available by and to Member States.

At the moment there are no other proposals to amend the Frontex Regulation. The Hague programme strengthening freedom, security and justice, invites the Commission to present to the Council an evaluation of the agency by the end of 2007. That evaluation should analyse the functions of the agency and indicate whether it should take on other responsibilities relating to aspects of border management.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) I was concerned less with the regulation and more with the vision. In 1998 I presented a report in this House on enlargement and internal security in which I proposed a European border service. The Tampere Summit addressed this idea, along with that of a European Police College. Frontex was created as an initial step in that direction. Does the Council Presidency share the vision of further developing Frontex and the battle groups into a real European border service for the common protection of our external borders?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (PT) I think that the Frontex Agency will develop and broaden its responsibilities in accordance with needs and, of course, the will of the Member States.

President. – Question No 8 by **Sarah Ludford** (H-0533/07)

Subject: Improvement of police cooperation

What are the intentions of the Portuguese Presidency regarding the progress of two important Commission proposals designed to increase the security of EU citizens against crime and terrorism, namely COM(2005)0317 final on the improvement of police cooperation between Member States at internal borders and COM(2005)0490 final on the exchange of information under the principle of availability?

Not all elements of these two proposals have been incorporated in the 'Prüm' Decision, so does the Presidency not agree that Member States' failure to agree them sends a poor signal about the importance and urgency with which they treat the challenge of cross-border law enforcement?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (PT) The Presidency agrees that improving cross-border cooperation for the purposes of law enforcement is not only an important and pressing question, but also a challenge.

The Council draft decision on the stepping up of cross-border cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism and cross-border crime – the well known 'Prüm' Decision – on which the Council reached political agreement in June 2007, represents considerable progress on the implementation of the principle of availability and the strengthening of cross-border police cooperation, in particular by means of joint operations and the provision of assistance for mass events, disasters and serious accidents.

The Presidency is of the opinion that the 'Prüm' Decision should be implemented as soon as possible, in order to enable tangible results to be achieved. The Presidency is therefore intending to concentrate its efforts on seeing that progress is made in the next few months on the Council draft decision implementing the 'Prüm' Decision.

The Presidency agrees with the honourable Member that not all the points in the two Commission proposals – one on improving police cooperation and the other on the principle of availability – are included in the 'Prüm' Decision. However, a considerable part of the Commission proposal on police cooperation is covered by the 'Prüm' Decision and the Presidency has no reason to think that reopening the debate on the other parts would lead to a different result from the one achieved in April 2006.

Whereas the Commission proposal on the principle of availability lays down general principles and covers six types of data, the 'Prüm' Decision in fact deals only with DNA data, fingerprints and vehicle registration data. The Presidency believes that phased implementation of the principle of availability is the most realistic and practical and is also among the approaches most likely to yield practical results in the short term for day-to-day police cooperation and improving security for EU citizens.

The Presidency believes that those practical results would send a strong signal regarding the importance and urgency attached to cross-border cooperation, thus demonstrating that practical cooperation is possible and is being implemented, even if only partially. That does not mean that we do not need to continue efforts to achieve even closer cooperation on law enforcement, in particular by means of the elements contained in the Commission proposals.

It is hoped, however, that this can be done on the basis of the results obtained to date as well as those resulting from implementing the 'Prüm' Decision.

Sarah Ludford (ALDE). – Mr President, can the Council therefore confirm that discussions in the Council on both the availability principle and the police cooperation measure have been suspended? You have recognised that the Prüm Treaty is less ambitious than either of those, so have you suspended them? Why can the Council keep legislating for things that infringe on people's personal privacy but they cannot get to the root of cooperation between police? One of the impediments to that is the lack of an overall data protection framework, of course. We were promised by the German Presidency that such an instrument would be adopted this year. Is the Portuguese Presidency actively progressing that, and what are the main blockages? The Council and the Member States need to get on with practical cooperation of policing within a firm data protection framework.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, President-in-Office of the Council. – (PT) The Portuguese Presidency is operating in this area in an ambitious but also realistic manner. When considering the measures taken or that we are proposing to take, we always look at the starting point and our intended destination and, in fact, on this matter of police cooperation, I think that we have made remarkable and considerable progress in relation to our starting point. Perhaps not all the progress that many would like to see, but something has been done and is being done if the Member States so desire.

The Portuguese Presidency will therefore support, develop and implement the measures that were agreed and that in our view represent positive progress in police cooperation in relation to the previous situation.

President. – Question No 9 by **Dimitrios Papadimoulis** (H-0536/07)

Subject: Ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate of Constantinople

Numerous events are indicative of the Turkish authorities' attempts to call into question the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Foreign Minister, for example, has expressly ruled out recognition by the Turkish Government of the ecumenical nature of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Furthermore, Turkish officials have been prohibited from attending a reception given by the Patriarchate of Constantinople because the invitation refers to the Patriarch as ecumenical. Moreover, the new national security policy of Turkey states that 'any attempt to overstep the current status of the Patriarchate must be deterred' and, finally, on 26 June 2007, the Turkish Supreme Court ruled that the Patriarchate of Constantinople is not ecumenical and that the Patriarch is head of the Greek Orthodox community of Istanbul.

Will the Council say whether the position of the Turkish authorities in regard to the Patriarchate of Constantinople is consistent with the Copenhagen political criteria and Turkey's obligations under the pre-accession process? What immediate representations will it make to the Turkish authorities?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) The Council has repeatedly stressed the importance it attaches to the issue of religious freedom in Turkey. Religious minorities and communities are still encountering difficulties linked to legal personality, property rights, schools, internal management and training, residence permits and work permits concerning Turkish and non-Turkish clergy in addition to the possibility of foreign clergy being elected leaders of their religious communities.

The specific problems facing the Orthodox Patriarchate, in particular the use of the ecclesiastical title of Ecumenical Patriarch, must also be examined in that context. That situation should not affect the rights guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights. Religious freedom is a fundamental area in which tangible progress needs to be made as a matter of urgency; it also requires specific action for the adoption and implementation of appropriate legislation in accordance with the European Convention on Human Rights and with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

More specifically, one of the short-term priorities in relations between the European Union and Turkey is the adoption of legislation that is in accordance with the relevant European standards and provides a response to all the difficulties encountered by minorities and non-Muslim religious communities. Similarly, social tolerance needs to be developed.

In that context, I can reassure the honourable Member that the issue of religious freedom will continue to be closely monitored, as part of the accession negotiations in the context of Chapter 23, Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, and of the ongoing process of reforms in Turkey, and will be broached at all levels whenever relevant. That was the case at the last Ministerial Troika meeting between the European Union and Turkey held in Ankara on 4 June.

Dimitrios Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, in the two and a half minutes during which you have spoken, you have confirmed the problem that I put to you in my question, but you have not adopted a clear position.

On 22 August Commissioner Rehn, speaking on behalf of the Commission, said that the Patriarch and the Patriarchate had to be free to use the ecclesiastical title 'Ecumenical' and added that Turkey had to ensure that non-Muslim communities could acquire legal status.

Does the Council share this unequivocal position adopted by the Commission? If so, why do you not say so clearly? If not, what are the reasons? Who has made you so reticent?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) Mr Papadimoulis, I think that, as regards questions of human rights in our relations with Turkey, the Presidency and the Council have been clear, demanding and firm both now and in the past, as they will also be in the future. I think, therefore, it is perhaps inappropriate to express doubts, reservations or scepticism on this matter.

We shall maintain our stance in our talks with Turkey, notably in the process of negotiations on Turkey's accession to the EU.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) We have discussed this many times before during Question Time, and I should like to ask when Turkey's law on religion will actually be adopted. We were assured of this over a year ago, and nothing has happened. This is a very specific point relevant not only to the country's accession negotiations but also to its compliance with the political Copenhagen criteria. The State does not have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of a church and arbitrarily deprive it of any legal status.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) As the honourable Member knows, there is a kind of annual review of the process of Turkey's accession to the EU. That review, or stock-taking of the process, takes place in the second half of each year and entails an analysis of and debate on all these issues on the basis of Commission reports.

That will take place again this year during the Portuguese Presidency and will provide a suitable opportunity, the right opportunity, moreover, for those issues to be debated – as they will be – by the Council.

President. – As the author is not present, Question No 10 lapses. Question No 11 by **Mairead McGuinness** (H-0540/07)

Subject: Outcome of the EU-Brazil summit

Could the Council give its assessment of the EU-Brazil summit held on 4 July 2007, in particular the economic and trade relations dimension?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) As you know, the EU-Brazil summit was held in Lisbon on 4 July with a view to launching a bilateral strategic partnership to enhance cooperation between the two parties in a wide range of areas of common interest.

A joint declaration was approved covering various areas in which our bilateral relations should be strengthened and it was agreed that this partnership with Brazil should be operational and forward-looking. The EU and Brazil worked together to draw up an action plan containing practical, joint, coordinated proposals on issues that will help to formulate a common agenda.

The interesting debate covered bilateral relations between the European Union and Brazil, regional issues, in particular developments in Europe and Latin America, but also world issues such as the Doha Development Agenda, effective multilateralism, climate change, combating poverty and social exclusion plus energy-related matters.

As regards trade relations, although the Lisbon summit was not the appropriate forum for technical negotiations, there was an interesting exchange of views. The Commissioner for Trade, Peter Mandelson, repeated that obtaining positive results in the Doha Development Round was, and would continue to be a priority for the EU.

Despite the disappointing results of the recent G4 Group meeting in Potsdam, talks continued in Geneva and no one wanted to miss the opportunity to reach an ambitious, balanced and comprehensive agreement.

Brazil thought that the two negotiating positions were not so wide apart. Continuing debate and closer coordination would make it possible to reach an agreement. Both parties concurred that reaching an agreement in Doha would help to conclude an agreement between the EU and Mercosul.

On the subjects of climate change and energy, both parties referred to the International Conference on Biofuels held on 5 and 6 July in Brussels, as a step in the right direction to allay criticisms that the use of biofuels was allegedly harmful.

In this context the President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, mentioned three essential areas: the setting of joint technical standards for a sustainable international market in biofuels, biofuels as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving security of food supply.

President Lula in turn linked the debate on climate change to reducing pollution, stating that the combined energy approach followed in Brazil over the past 20 years had proved to be more environmentally friendly and environmentally sound than the EU's high-technology engines. Furthermore, he refuted the allegations of threats to the Amazon forest and to security of food supply.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Thank you very much for the comprehensive outline of the range of interests that were discussed. Clearly, agriculture was amongst them, but could I ask whether the controversial issue of beef exports from Brazil to the European Union was raised, as well as the concerns about standards in relation to those, and if there is common ground on the WTO – the Doha Round – between the two parties? Was the issue of double standards – the higher standards within the European Union, compared with those countries outside and specifically, in this case, Brazil – raised as part of the talks?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) The summit was, as mentioned here, an initiative of the Portuguese Presidency; it was the first summit meeting held with Brazil and will, we hope, lead to the development of strategic relations with that country.

That was a first initiative. It was intended to identify those areas and sectors where we should like to develop closer relations with Brazil. Economic issues were broached, but you will understand that they were broached in a more general and strategic context, focusing in particular upon issues that are on the agenda within the scope of the talks in the Doha negotiating process.

Clearly, more specific questions will need to be approached at a more technical and more appropriate level. In the meantime trade issues in general and the concerns which both the EU and Brazil have regarding those issues were approached with great openness and frankness, with each party expressing its points of view and expressing the hope that the Doha negotiating process can be brought to a successful conclusion.

Jim Allister (NI). – I take that answer as a 'no' to Mrs McGuinness' question; that you did not trouble to press the Brazilian authorities about the lamentable health standards pertaining to their beef exports and the total lack of traceability in respect of their livestock herds.

It will come as a grave disappointment to farming and consumer interests across Europe that, when you had the opportunity, you failed to press this all-important issue.

When is the Council going to wake up to the health implications for the citizens of Europe and press Brazil for realistic traceability in respect of their livestock?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I think that, with the launching of this initiative by the Portuguese Presidency, all the conditions are now in place for an open and frank debate with Brazil on all the issues that could disrupt our bilateral relations, but also on all those that could develop and strengthen those relations.

I also think that, on matters where the EU and Brazil might hold differing views, the summit and the initiative of the Portuguese Presidency is an extremely useful tool for opening and extending the frank discussion needed on issues where the positions of the two parties do not, perhaps, fully coincide.

President. – Question No 12 by **Marianne Mikko** (H-0542/07)

Subject: EU assistance to Estonia regarding agreements on fisheries with Russia on Lake Peipsi

The Council is undoubtedly aware that 126 kilometres of the EU-Russia border run along Lake Peipsi. Estonian-Russian bilateral agreements have coordinated the protection of Peipsi's sensitive ecosystem and fish stocks. However, the evidence of danger to the fish stocks caused by Russian disregard for agreements has been accumulating.

Particularly, the Danish seine is used by the Russian side almost all year, instead of during the very limited period agreed. Russian markets offer reliable evidence that the Russian official measures are inadequate to protect undersized Peipsi fish of several varieties.

The Russian side has delayed the negotiations for the 2007 autumn season under various pretexts.

What does the Council intend to do to assist the EU Member State Estonia in what are essentially negotiations between the EU and Russia on quotas and their management in the future?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) In reply to the honourable Member's question on negotiations between the EU and Russia on quotas and their management in the future, the Council would like to stress that, although the Common Fisheries Policy specifically covers the conservation, management, and exploitation of living aquatic resources, Council Regulation (EC) No 2371/2002 of 20 December 2002 on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy defines 'living aquatic resources' as 'available and accessible living marine aquatic species, including anadromous and catadromous species during their marine life';

Furthermore, on 28 July 2006 the European Community and the Government of the Russian Federation initialled a bilateral agreement on cooperation in fisheries and the conservation of the living marine resources in the Baltic Sea. That agreement is due to be signed and come into force in the near future as soon as the Russian Federation has completed its domestic procedures for signature.

That agreement covers all the waters of the Baltic Sea and its straits, but excludes internal waters. Notwithstanding the geographical area of application of the agreement, Article 13 provides that the Parties may agree to extend cooperation on the management of anadromous and catadromous species, but excludes species which live their entire life cycle in internal waters.

Consequently, as Community law stands, the Council can only recommend that the honourable Member address her question to the European Commission, so that the matter is raised in the context of the bilateral agreement between the European Community and the Government of the Russian Federation as soon as that agreement enters into force.

Marianne Mikko (PSE). – (ET) But the reply as it relates to Lake Peipsi does not entirely satisfy me: in terms of size it is the third largest lake in the European Union and the only one where a professional fishing industry operates. It is not a body of water internal to Estonia, but a border lake with a third country, namely Russia. Where prudent exploitation of fish stocks is concerned Estonia, a Member State of the European Union, is doing everything in its power to ensure the conservation of stocks in Lake Peipsi. The same cannot, however, be said for Russia.

As a result I would nevertheless like to hear from the President-in-Office how the Council proposes to influence Russia to conserve Lake Peipsi's fish stocks as Estonia is doing? What sort of specific own responsibility are you able to propose here today as President of the European Union? You mentioned the Commission but the reply which you gave was more concerned with seas. Peipsi is a border lake whose situation is very specific, it is not an internal body of water.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) The honourable Member wishes her question to stand and I, unfortunately, have to say that my answer also stands. I would recommend, as I did at the end of my last speech, that the honourable Member address her question to the European Commission.

President. – Question No 13 by **Brian Crowley** (H-0547/07)

Subject: EU-Bosnia relations

Can the Council make a statement giving an up-to-date assessment of EU-Bosnian political relations at this time?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) The political situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina is in a very delicate phase.

The verdict of the International Court of Justice in the case brought at the end of February by Bosnia-Herzegovina against Serbia and Montenegro on the application of the Convention on Genocide, brought to the surface the antagonisms which seemed to have been to some extent assuaged following the setting up of the Council of Ministers on 9 February.

The EU told the Bosnian authorities that it feared that the deterioration of the political climate in the country, the return of nationalist rhetoric and lack of political will to reach an agreement were endangering the reform process. Bosnia-Herzegovina needs to operate effectively as a single economic and administrative space in order to ensure progress for its citizens and on the path towards EU membership.

As regards relations with the EU and the stabilisation and association process, the technical talks on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement were concluded in December, all Member States having given full support to the result of the technical negotiations on that agreement on 3 May. The conclusion of the talks on the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is being held up by the lack of tangible progress on police reform.

The recently appointed High Representative/EU Special Representative, Miroslav Lajčák, who took up office at the beginning of July, set as his initial and immediate priorities, in line with the concerns of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council and of the Council of the European Union, the creation of a constructive political climate and the restructuring of the police force. In that context the High Representative/EU Special Representative is confident that progress can be achieved by the end of this month.

Brian Crowley (UEN). – I would like to thank the President-in-Office for his response. Rather than go through every single issue, I will concentrate on the question of police reform because this is the most urgent matter at the present time. Are there any proposals from the Council with regard to putting together a team of facilitators to allow the different traditions in Bosnia-Herzegovina to come together to agree a common standard or common code for how the police force should work? It already exists in the border protection area but not on the police side.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) Thank you for your question, suggestion and opinion. We are naturally eagerly waiting with great interest to hear what proposals the new Special Representative will present on this matter of reform of the police force in Bosnia-Herzegovina under this chapter of police cooperation. If they took the form of an item raised by the Special Representative with the Council and of a solution or suggestion from the High Representative – who is working directly on this case which, as you rightly said, is fundamental for the stability of Bosnia-Herzegovina – if such a proposal were made and submitted to us, naturally the Council would consider it.

We think any suggestions, means and proposals that might be of real help in achieving the final and fundamental objective of stability and progress in Bosnia-Herzegovina must be taken into account.

President. – Questions Nos 14, 15 and 16 have been withdrawn.

President. – As the author is not present, Question No 17 lapses. Question No 18 by **Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg** (H-0559/07)

Subject: The European Court of Auditors

The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 significantly changed the EU's institutional framework, incorporating into it the European Court of Auditors (Article 7 of the Treaty). By making the Court of Auditors one of its fundamental institutions, the Union demonstrated the importance it attached to transparency and the need to improve its work.

The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe⁽²⁾ also changed the institutional framework, excluding from it the Court of Auditors, which then came under 'other institutions and advisory bodies' in Title IV, Chapter II of the Treaty.

The ongoing work on a new treaty does not involve plans to amend the 'institutional framework', resulting in a deterioration of the status of the European institutions' external auditor. Given that the Union should be improving its accountability to citizens, can the Council explain its decision to lower the status of the Court of Auditors?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) This question will probably receive the fastest answer this session because it is not, in fact, within the Council's brief to comment on the work of the Intergovernmental Conference for the reform of the Treaties which, as we know, began on 23 July 2007.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, it really does seem to me that this is very much a question for the Council to raise, especially as we are currently talking about a new treaty that is set to revolutionise the new European Union, and placing the Court of Auditors in the section 'other institutions and advisory bodies' is a clear downgrading of this institution in terms of how it is viewed by citizens.

The control function of the Court of Auditors is not just based on monitoring expenses and checking whether our common funds – the European Union's public funds – have been properly distributed; it is the watchdog for budgetary discipline throughout the European Union, including in the Council, Parliament and the European Commission. Its recommendations and judgments help us all in our work. The strong position of the Court of Auditors must be clear and evident to all EU citizens, as it is also the institution that confirms citizens' trust in the EU as a whole.

If you do not think that this is a matter for the Council, then I should like to know who it is a matter for, because the Council's remit – and the remit of the work currently being carried out – also includes the matter of locating the Court of Auditors in the right place, and in my view the right place is where all the most important EU institutions can be found (I am talking about the new treaty that we are currently engaged in drafting).

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) Naturally I took note of your concerns and comments, but I am here as the representative of the Council. The Council as such is not empowered to comment on the subject of the Intergovernmental Conference where the Member States sit round a table to discuss given items precisely in their capacity as Member States, that is, independent sovereign states acting completely independently as Member States. The Council therefore has no competence to comment on that subject. The Intergovernmental Conference does, however, have its own bodies, its own structures and presidency and naturally due note will be taken, if you so wish, of any suggestions, criticisms and advice you wish to offer on expediting the work within the Intergovernmental Conference. However, the Council of the European Union as such is not, as I say, entitled to comment on the work of the Intergovernmental Conference in view of the judicial nature of that Conference.

President. – As the authors are not present, Questions Nos 19 and 20 lapse. Question No 21 by **Marian Harkin** (H-0566/07)

Subject: Demarcation between Schengen and non-Schengen Member States

Taking into account the statements from both the Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern and the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who stated that both countries needed to end the demarcation between Schengen and non-Schengen Member States, and in view of the Portuguese Presidency's priorities in relation to Schengen,

⁽²⁾ OJ C 310, 16.12.2004, p. 1.

can the Council comment on how it intends to open further border controls and cooperation between Schengen and non-Schengen Member States before the end of the Presidency?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) At its meeting on 12 and 13 June 2007 the Council asked the Portuguese Presidency to adhere to the timetable for Schengen Information System evaluation visits, with a view to adopting by November 2007 the decisions referred to in Article 3(2) of the 2003 Act of Accession with regard to those Member States which acceded to the European Union in 2004 and were given until the end of December 2007 to end border controls at internal land borders and at maritime borders, and until March 2008 at the latest for air borders, as soon as all the conditions were met. With regard to Ireland and the United Kingdom, Article 4 of Protocol 2 of the Treaty of Amsterdam incorporating the Schengen *acquis* within the scope of the European Union states that Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which are not bound by the Schengen *acquis*, may at any time request to take part in some or all of the provisions of this *acquis*. Those Member States have not to date asked to apply the provisions in the Schengen *acquis* concerning the abolition of control of persons at internal borders. Since Ireland and the United Kingdom have not made any such request, the Council Presidency can do little with regard to this matter.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Thank you for your reply. There have been statements by the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, and the Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, that both countries needed to end the demarcation between Schengen and non-Schengen. However, in your reply you say that no formal request has been received from either country. Has there been any informal request or approach from either the UK or Ireland on this issue, and can you outline for me, if possible, how it might be possible to apply part of the Schengen *acquis*, rather than all of it?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I cannot add anything on this question to what I said in my initial contribution. Naturally the Schengen Agreement contains its own provisions and articles on the application and scope of application of the agreement, and we must abide by those articles and provisions.

President. – Question No 22 by **Proinsias De Rossa (H-0568/07)**

Subject: Establishment of EU-Israel Subcommittee on Human Rights

In November 2005 the EU-Israel Subcommittee on Political Dialogue and Cooperation established an EU-Israel human rights working group.

Will the Council consider upgrading the EU-Israel human rights working group into a subcommittee on human rights which would meet more regularly than the working group (which up to February 2007 had met on only two occasions) and which could hold regular and systematic consultations with civil society in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the EU to assess the human rights situation in Israel and the OPT?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council (PT)*. – The EU-Israel human rights working group, set up at the meeting of the EU-Israel Subcommittee on Political Dialogue and Cooperation on 21 November 2005, is the platform which makes it possible to make a regular, systematic and in-depth analysis as well as for both parties to debate human rights issues, as the honourable Member wishes, and as the Council itself wishes.

Moreover, human rights is a constant theme at all levels of the ongoing political contact between the EU and Israel. Civil society organisations, as mentioned in the honourable Member's question, are already making a contribution to such exchanges.

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE). – Quite honestly, that is a non-answer. I asked if the working group, which has met only twice since 2005, would be upgraded to a subcommittee on human rights.

After 40 years of occupation of the Palestinian territories, there are clearly persistent breaches of Palestinian human rights as a result of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

I ask the Council to indicate what its attitude is to upgrading the human rights working group to a subcommittee, which would meet regularly and keep some kind of pressure on the Israeli authorities to comply with human rights norms, which we all expect civilised societies and democracies to comply with.

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I should like to tell the honourable Member, as I said, that respect for and protection of human rights are constant themes in dialogue between the EU and third countries.

It is one of the Council's concerns and an ongoing and constant concern of the successive presidencies of the Council and that also applies to the Portuguese Presidency. Portugal is particularly attentive to human rights, for its own historical reasons. Only yesterday I had the opportunity to point out here to some honourable Members of the European Parliament that, since we ourselves had a dictatorship in Portugal until 1974, we are particularly sensitive to anything relating to democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Those topics are particularly dear to our hearts and therefore feature in our dialogue with third countries, including Israel; we shall always include those points in the regular dialogue that we have with the Israeli authorities.

President. – Question No 23 by **Johan Van Hecke** (H-0572/07)

Subject: Situation in Zimbabwe

The political and economic situation in Zimbabwe has reportedly assumed 'life-threatening proportions'. The police have arrested more than 1 300 shop keepers and managers who refused to halve the price of their products, as President Mugabe's government had instructed. Halving prices has led to panic buying at large chains of stores. Essentials such as sugar, cooking oil and bread are now obtainable only on the black market. Petrol stations are dry. According to eye witnesses, many shops have been looted by government party supporters. Inflation – the highest in the world – is the result of the never-ending printing of money with which the Government pays civil servants, police officers and soldiers. According to the opposition party MDC, the Government is attempting, nine months ahead of the presidential elections, to secure the votes of the poor. Representatives of the Zanu-PF government party are reported to have dismissed a request by South African President Mbeki to go to Pretoria.

What is the position of the Council? Will it call on the Government to shoulder its responsibilities in the crisis to a greater extent?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) The Council is closely monitoring the critical political and economic situation in Zimbabwe. The Council debated this issue at its meeting on 23 April 2007 and obtained further information on the problem at its meeting on 22 July, therefore very recently.

The Council's strategy has been public knowledge ever since the restrictive measures were first introduced. In 2002 the Council decided to introduce restrictive measures against Zimbabwe's leaders declaring that, as long as human rights continued to be violated the Council would deem it necessary to maintain restrictive measures against the Zimbabwe Government and against those responsible for such violations, and for infringement of the right to freedom of opinion, association and peaceful assembly. Furthermore, the Council stated that such measures would be revoked only when the conditions were in place to guarantee respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law.

In response to the recent acts of violence and violation of human rights, on 23 April the Council decided to extend the visa ban list. Since the introduction of the restrictive measures the Council has tried to involve the Africa's multilateral institutions. The Council has systematically included the question of Zimbabwe on the agenda for all ministerial meetings organised with SADC ever since the measures were introduced. The EU also raised the question of Zimbabwe with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The Council praised in particular the initiative of SADC and the mandate given to President Mbeki to facilitate dialogue between the opposition and the Government, as well as the appointment of Mr Kikwete as Chair of the SADC organ. The Council is looking forward to seeing the first results of these African initiatives; if appropriate it will review its position accordingly.

Johan Van Hecke (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, the situation in Zimbabwe is gradually becoming hopeless – and that is putting it mildly. Sadly, the international community, including the EU, is standing by helplessly.

I should like to put a brief supplementary question to the Council, as the Portuguese Presidency is organising an EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon on 8 and 9 December. This has not been possible in recent years, as agreement could not be reached on the issue of whether or not to invite President Mugabe. My question is very specific, and I expect a similarly specific reply: is the Presidency intending to invite President Mugabe to Lisbon in December? Secondly, in what way is the Council hoping to raise the situation in Zimbabwe at the Summit?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) As I said, the EU has been closely monitoring the situation in Zimbabwe and has taken the measures it considers most appropriate in that respect. In turn the European Council has always made it understood in the conclusions of its meetings that it is of strategic importance for the European Union to keep up a global, comprehensive and detailed dialogue with Africa as a whole.

It is that mandate, which we are given by the European Council, which reflects the interest in and the commitment to this global dialogue which we must hold with the African countries because we have much to discuss, but also to cooperate on, with Africa. It is with that objective and that intention that the Portuguese Presidency is determined to conduct the second EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in December. We are convinced that that Summit is in our interest and in the interest of the other Member States, in the interest of the EU and also of Africa.

With Africa we have to discuss immigration, the economy, trade, energy, the climate, and also naturally human rights and good governance, subjects which we have already been discussing and which were also debated and discussed at the first Summit held in Cairo in 2000 during Portugal's previous Presidency.

It is an objective which we set for our Presidency and it is an objective which we intend to continue to work towards in close cooperation with our partners, both within the EU and also in Africa.

President. – Question No 24 by **Danutė Budreikaitė** (H-0575/07)

Subject: North European Gas Pipeline

During the German EU Presidency, a representative of that country stated that 'Nord Stream' was a project involving private companies and over which the EU had no influence.

On 15 July 2007, in an interview given to Lithuanian television, the German Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, stated that Nord Stream was not a German and Russian project but a trans-European project. The EU would oppose the project if Lithuania's energy and ecological interests were damaged.

What is the opinion of the Portuguese Presidency on the matter? Is Nord Stream a private project or an EU project? What is its place in the future common EU energy policy?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) With regard to the points raised by the honourable Member and to the first question, the Council would point out that it does not comment on reports in the media.

Secondly, and in reply to the second question, the Council would remind the honourable Member that the 'Nord Stream' project is a private project being carried out by 'Nord Stream AG' as a joint venture. Moreover, as the Council mentioned in its answer to Oral Question H-0121/07 by Nils Lundgren on the Russo-German gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea, the development of a pipeline between Russia and Germany through the Baltic Sea was declared a project of European interest in Decision No 1364/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. For a more detailed explanation of that declaration, the Council would refer the honourable Member to the answer to that question.

On the third question, the Council would point out that the construction of a new gas pipeline in the north of Europe along that route is in accordance with the objective of the European Union's energy policy to improve the Community's security of supply. Effective diversification of energy sources and transport routes was mentioned in the European Council's Community action plan of March 2007 as one of the means of improving security of supply. The Community *acquis* will always be applied in its entirety whenever necessary, including in particular Community legislation on the environment, to those parts of the gas pipeline built within the territory of the EU Member States.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) I find it difficult to understand whether it is a private project or an EU project. The gas pipeline is laid through the Baltic Sea and not just two, but several countries are located near it. There is a great danger that weapons lying on the seabed will be raised. The project has not even got off the ground, yet Russia and Germany have already changed the route.

I would like to say that it is now difficult to understand whose project it is. Is it a private project or an EU project? The gas pipeline is laid through the Baltic Sea and not just two, but several countries are located near it. There is a great danger that weapons lying on the seabed will be raised. The project has not even got off the ground, yet Russia and Germany have already changed the route because it was discovered that there is a huge accumulation of weapons dating from the Second World War close to Denmark, Finland, Estonia

and Sweden. Can it be a private project if it creates not only an energy supply problem – that is, a gas supply problem – for nearby countries, but also an ecological problem in the Baltic Sea?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) On this question, I do not have much to add to what I said in my first answer, that is specifically to repeat our promise that the Community *acquis* will be applied in its entirety whenever necessary and always when environmental questions are at issue. I hope, therefore, that our statement allays and provides a response to the concerns which the honourable Member expressed.

President. – Question No 25 by **Luisa Morgantini** (H-0576/07)

Subject: Mordechai Vanunu sentenced to six months in prison

On 2 July 2007, Mordechai Vanunu – a former nuclear technician and a pacifist for over 20 years – was sentenced by the Jerusalem Magistrates' Court to six months in prison for (according to the Israeli authorities) breaching the terms of an administrative order restricting his freedom of speech and freedom of movement.

Vanunu was abducted in Rome and transferred to Israel, where he was imprisoned and accused of high treason for having spoken to the Sunday Times about Israel's nuclear weapons programme. He was tried in camera and sentenced to 18 years in prison, 11 of which were to be spent in solitary confinement. On his release from prison in 2004, significant restrictions were placed (pursuant to the above-mentioned order) on his freedom: in particular, he was denied any contact with people from countries other than Israel and he was not allowed to approach embassies and consulates, own a mobile telephone, access the Internet or leave Israel.

What action is the Council intending to take vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities in response to these violations of the fundamental rights of free speech and free movement?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) As may be seen from our answers to questions H-0577/04, H-0302/05, P-1687/05 and E-3413/05, the Council is following with interest the case of Mordechai Vanunu, especially his situation following his release in 2004, mentioned by the honourable Member in her question.

President. – Question No 26 by **Richard Howitt** (H-0578/07)

Subject: Progress on the Temporary Agency Workers Directive

What are the results of the initial consultations undertaken by the Portuguese Presidency with a view to seeking agreement on the draft Temporary Agency Workers Directive (COM(2002)0701)?

Does the President-in-Office expect to put the amended proposal for a directive to a vote in the Council during the current Presidency, and which timetable has he set down for informal and formal negotiations in relation to this?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I should like to tell you that, as a result of preliminary consultations with the Member States, the Portuguese Presidency decided to reopen the debates on the proposal for a directive on temporary agency workers, which it regards as an important element in the debate on flexicurity.

Since this dossier has not been examined by the Council since 2004, it is important to take stock of the current stage reached and to reflect upon the possible courses to be followed. The Presidency will shortly be taking measures to that end.

Richard Howitt (PSE). – I would like to thank the President-in-Office for the warm words that he gave. Indeed, flexicurity is a good principle, as we say in this Chamber and in the European institutions. However, many people say that flexibility we see a lot of, but where is the security? The Temporary Agency Workers Directive remains a real test of whether there is to be that security aspect. I wonder what the President-in-Office thinks are the blockages at the moment, within the European Council of Ministers, that are preventing progress being made. Despite the good offices of the Presidency, how confident is he that the Council will indeed be able to reach agreement during the term of office of our Portuguese colleagues?

Manuel Lobo Antunes, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (PT) I thank the honourable Member for his question. As I indicated, this is a dossier that the Portuguese Presidency wants to work on and take forward. We have always said that the success of a presidency depends in the first place on the presidency itself, but

that it must also rely on the commitment, cooperation and will to move forward of all the Member States. This is one case which we could not possibly bring to a safe harbour, so to speak, without all the Member States on our side.

We should be pleased if, during the Portuguese Presidency, we could at least make significant progress even if we cannot reach full agreement. We shall work towards that in the hope, as I said, that our partners will be able to accept our suggestions and proposals, whilst also taking a realistic approach to this question, because we know that this is a complex debate and a complex issue, as the history of this Directive shows.

As regards flexicurity, I can tell you that for Portugal and for this Portuguese Presidency flexicurity means flexibility but also security and for us the two go together. Thank you very much.

President. – Questions which have not been answered for lack of time will be answered in writing (see Annex).

That concludes Question Time.

(The sitting was suspended at 7 p.m. and resumed at 9 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROTHE

Vice-President

14. Human rights dialogues and consultations on human rights with third countries (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0302/2007) by Mrs Valenciano Martínez-Orozco, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the functioning of the human rights dialogues and consultations on human rights with third countries (2007/2001 (INI)).

Elena Valenciano Martínez-Orozco (PSE), rapporteur. – (ES) Madam President, the birth of the European Union was inspired by inalienable values. In the same way that we keep a close watch on our Member States to make sure that they do not violate the right to freedom, or to life, or to democracy, we must have a decisive influence through dialogue on those countries with whom we have political, trade, economic or partnership relations, etc., so that they also respect human rights.

Within the complexity and magnitude of the EU's external relations, the space occupied by dialogue and human rights consultations with third countries could go unnoticed or remain in the background. If that were the case, and we were to allow it, we would be making a very serious mistake.

This report deals with the aspects that are necessary to improve a task that is an EU obligation, according to EU Article 11 of the EU Treaty, and which also comes under political ethics. Human rights should be the banner of EU external policy and the EU should use its influence to improve the living conditions of people in the countries with which it has relations. This is one of the key political elements in this report.

When we sit down to negotiate economic or trade agreements with a country in which fundamental rights are violated, we cannot put figures, agreements and contracts on the table while shamefully brushing under the carpet the situation that its citizens are going through.

If we leave human rights outside the negotiating room, we will be falling into the most macabre cynicism. We also need to take a close look at the role played by civil society and human rights defenders, significant voices that are essential for progress in all oppressed societies.

The report we are debating today evaluates one of the main instruments that the European Union has for achieving the objectives I have mentioned and also for clearly defining the role that we want to play in the world order. It is only through respect and reciprocity that we can make progress in the task of promoting human rights.

There is absolutely no question of acting through imposition and paternalism. We are not in a position to give lectures to anyone, but we do have an obligation to maintain consistency in our external actions and to promote relations with those countries that are making progress, avoiding imbalances and à la carte treatment that undermine our credibility.

The report that I am presenting to this House calls for action on three levels: more consistency in conducting dialogues and consultations, which will require greater coordination between the Council, whose absence from this debate I regret, the Commission and Parliament, using a mechanism to facilitate smooth communication and avoid contradictions between the various Community institutions. It is about us really speaking with one clear voice.

It is also about transparency in the management of dialogues and consultations which, in the field of human rights, should be a principle, not an exception. The flexibility and pragmatism required in order to achieve specific results should not obscure the picture regarding the agenda, objectives or the result of dialogue.

We are calling for the European Parliament's role to be strengthened, which, ladies and gentlemen, is what is really lacking in the management of this instrument, without there being any legal or formal justification for this.

The European Parliament is prepared to act responsibly in the area of its external powers. This House has established itself as the key European institution in the field of human rights, making them its focus, and it is resolved to use every method available to it to carry out its role as the political guarantor of the external action of the Union.

The European Parliament urges the Commission and the Council to listen to and put into practice the recommendations of this report, which are widely supported by all the political groups in this House.

Ladies and gentlemen, Parliament's voice must be heard. We know that what we are asking for will require a great deal of effort, and we are therefore considering the need to extend the resources allocated to human rights units, both in the Commission and in the Council, the latter not being present at this debate.

However, this is the minimum requirement for a European Union that claims to uphold before the world that human rights are an inalienable European right. If we want to be credible, we need to work together towards this.

Joe Borg, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, the report prepared by the rapporteur, Ms Valenciano Martínez-Orozco, and the resolution before Parliament address a highly important but also increasingly complex instrument of the European Union's external human rights policy.

Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner (who regrets not to be able to attend this debate today) had accordingly instructed her services to lend every support to the rapporteur in her difficult task of scrutinising the functioning of the human rights dialogues and consultations with third countries.

The report adds a further building block to Parliament's remarkable work in assessing the EU toolbox on human rights, through its regular annual reports, the Agnoletto report on human rights clauses, the study of the European Inter-University Centre on the impact of Parliament's activities in the field of human rights, as well as the study on the guidelines on torture. The report also usefully complements the regular review of the human rights dialogues and consultations undertaken by the Council and by the Commission.

The Commission would like to compliment the rapporteur and Parliament on its report and the detailed analysis and recommendations devoted to the European Union's human rights dialogues and consultations.

The Commission takes the view that, of all human rights instruments at our disposal, it is the dialogues that probably provide the best chance to secure positive, long-term results in the development of the respect for human rights worldwide, as long as we are prepared to invest sufficient time and energy in them.

We firmly believe that the European Union can obtain success in advancing the human rights record of third countries only through patient work of bridge-building and persuasion, and this not just in its bilateral relations but also in the framework of multilateral bodies, as developments in the Human Rights Council demonstrate.

The great variety and number of European Union human rights dialogues and consultations with third countries – which, moreover, are steadily increasing – make any global evaluation very arduous.

Structured dialogues, such as with China; agreement-based dialogues like those with many neighbourhood countries; consultations with like-minded partners, such as with the US and Canada, or local troika dialogues with a range of countries all differ in many respects, be it their periodicity, the policy level, the kind of interlocutors, the depth of the discussions or the fact that some are combined with civil society events and others are not.

Far from being a shortcoming of the instrument, the Commission sees such variety as proof of the dynamism and potential of the dialogue instrument and an asset that should be preserved. The EU guidelines on human rights dialogues and the Cotonou (ACP-EU) Agreement both stress the importance of flexibility to take into account the different country situations, their evolution over time and the dynamic relationships between any given third country and the European Union.

Therefore, while keeping common base lines and targets for the dialogue, it would not be advisable to strictly align all their modalities. For this instrument to be effective it needs to be tailor-made and able to adapt to changing circumstances.

It also needs to be borne in mind that the various dialogues and consultations are in different stages of maturity. The dialogue with China or the consultations with like-minded countries have developed more or less consolidated modalities over several years and therefore allow for rather intensive, deep discussions.

In other cases, such as the dialogues with neighbourhood countries, we are still polishing the instrument and are in the phase of building up the necessary confidence to allow for genuinely meaningful exchanges.

We are therefore confident that, also in these cases, issues such as the desirable participation of experts from line ministries, involvement of civil society or the consideration of individual cases will eventually become possible once the exercise finds its own solid ground.

Finally, you can rest assured that the recommendations directed at the Commission will be examined carefully, and you can count on our commitment to improve the information to Parliament in order to allow for increased transparency of human rights dialogues and consultations.

Feleknas Uca (GUE/NGL), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality.* – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to start by expressing my sincere thanks to the rapporteur for her report. I am pleased that she has taken such full account of the recommendation I made in my opinion on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. Particular attention needs to be paid to the role of women in human rights dialogues with third countries where their health and safety is concerned. Human rights include the right of women to make decisions concerning their lives and reproduction free of discrimination, coercion and violence. Sadly, human rights dialogues still take insufficient account of this.

Roberta Alma Anastase, *on behalf of the PPE-DE.* – (RO) Madam President, on behalf of the European People's Party I welcome the drawing up of this report which is of major importance for the future of EU dialogue and consultations with third countries and for the role of the European Parliament.

Above all, the European Union is a union of democratic values promoting peace, tolerance and respect for human rights. Therefore, it is crucial that any dialogue started and carried out with third countries focuses on the need to guarantee and protect fundamental freedoms and human rights, not only in Europe but in the whole world.

This report aims at proposing solution for improving the operation of EU dialogue and consultations with third countries in the field of human rights. Therefore, the report focuses on 3 concepts for enhancing efficiency: dialogue and consultation coherence, transparency and visibility.

The more active involvement of the European Parliament in this process is also important. I think that the European Parliament has a legitimate right to take part in this dialogue, to perform the democratic scrutiny that is assigned to it by the European citizens.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for the kindness analysing within the report the dialogue with neighbouring countries located in the eastern EU. A major priority of European Union foreign policy is the creation of a real democratic area on our eastern border and dialogue on human rights should be considered as a very important instrument. The creation of joint subcommissions for human rights would be an important step, for neighbouring countries as well, where a continuous deterioration of human rights is occurring.

I would like to focus on one thing, even if it is not part of the neighbourhood policy. Russia is another Eastern partner that should finally accept that a direct dialogue in the field of human rights cannot cause but a better life of its own citizens.

I do not want to conclude without mentioning with satisfactory coverage of women's rights within this report.!

Véronique De Keyser, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, the report by Mrs Valenciano concerns an essential aspect of European values: the human rights dialogue. This dialogue, mentioned in various agreements with many countries and in various instruments, is in a way the signature of the soft power that is Europe.

This report was the subject of a vast consensus. Today, the only amendments that remain were presented by the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group on the extreme right. Curiously, all these amendments are signed by my compatriots, members of *Vlaams Belang*. But what does this group, which recently made itself rather conspicuous in Brussels by supporting a demonstration against Islam that was banned by the authorities, actually want? This is quite interesting.

Firstly, they want to restrict human rights to civil and political rights and are removing social, environmental, economic and cultural rights from the text. While invoking the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, they neglect to say that at the same time, the same UN General Assembly voted in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which they are quick to forget about.

Secondly, they are proposing to link genital mutilation, early marriage and trafficking in human beings with religious practices – undoubtedly Islam – which is a crude link to make. No way! These practices are reprehensible; they may be cultural, perhaps tribal, but they are criminal and are not in any way religious.

Finally, thirdly, the ITS has a go at Turkey in a tirade against the party of Messrs Erdogan and Gül that singularly lacks any basis.

To conclude, the report by Mrs Valenciano is a remarkable report, open but at the same time very firm. It is anything but angelic. Just read paragraph 22, which states that human rights dialogue should always be backed up by diplomatic pressure at every level, and I am talking to the Council! It is a pity that certain extremist groups are using it as a platform for their intolerance and hatred.

Anders Samuelsen, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DA) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I should like to commend Mrs Valenciano on her well-balanced report, and to thank her for being so obliging in incorporating many of the amendments presented by our committee. The result is a clear, thorough report, which contains a number of good recommendations for strengthening the EU's human rights dialogues with third countries and promoting human rights and democracy.

The EU must enhance its role as a proactive actor when it comes to promoting human rights, and so I am pleased that the Council has taken the initiative in incorporating human rights into EU policy. It is good that the European Parliament is advocating the systematic inclusion of human rights issues in the agenda of the EU's political dialogues and external policy. It is only by systematising the dialogues that we can improve the use of benchmarks and bring coherence to endeavours to promote human rights. However, the EU should not lay down such exacting requirements that the dialogue, drowning in requirements to report against indicators, forgets to pursue its original objectives. Dialogue must be used to open up an engaging, confidence-inspiring political space that, rather than only ever identifying violations, also identifies progress in the human rights field.

We must recognise that the human rights dialogues face major challenges. The human rights situation in a number of countries gives cause for concern. It is crucial to the EU's relations with important trading partners that we attach increased importance to linking trading relations to human rights reforms. Trade agreements with third countries should be seen as a tool with consequences reaching beyond the purely economic. Environmental and human rights issues must be incorporated from the outset and be placed on an equal footing with economic issues. The dialogue with third countries must help strengthen democratic, social, political and environmental rights, and therefore it should also be made clear that trade agreements must contain an unambiguous mechanism for how and when agreements can be suspended in the event that one trading partner fails to comply with human rights or democracy clauses. There can be no doubt, however, that the greatest progress is achieved by giving third countries an incentive to comply with the political and economic requirements that form part of agreements. We must strike a balance in bilateral dialogues, whereby we can still exert pressure but have reciprocity and genuine dialogue as a cornerstone.

Hélène Flautre, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, as I believe Mrs Valenciano has shown very clearly in her excellent report, we are overflowing with concrete proposals that will certainly be very useful to the Portuguese Presidency, as it has stated its aim to achieve tangible results on human rights and democracy. We have for some time been calling for greater coherence, transparency and results in our

discussions with third countries, jointly with the Commission and the Council. All that remains is actually to go from words to action.

I am convinced that you know as well as I do that all it takes is organisation to make human rights dialogues more effective, beyond their diversity. Firstly, this means setting up clear, public objectives assigned to each dialogue so that a coherent, shared strategy, appropriated at the highest level, emerges.

Secondly, it means setting up indicators to allow proper evaluation of the results achieved by a dialogue and informing MEPs of them so that, for example when a delegation visits the country, they can check what progress has been made and discuss it with civil society and human rights activists, to be better able to question their partners on the commitments made within the framework of the dialogue. On this score, we are still waiting to be informed of the indicators that should be used to evaluate the dialogue recently established with Uzbekistan.

Thirdly, it means guaranteeing that human rights are taken into account in all the EU's external policies, including trade policy, migration policy and the fight against terrorism. It is our credibility in talking about human rights that is at stake here. For example, can anyone explain how we can currently be discussing the implementation of guidelines against torture with Jordan in the Subcommittee on Human Rights, the first subcommittee to be set up under the neighbourhood policy, today held up as a model, when we know that European Member States have covered up the subcontracting of torture by the CIA? How can we be discussing torture and the fight against it in this subcommittee?

Our first job as MEPs is to evaluate the pertinence of the EU's action, and to do this, you can count on the delegations, the committees and the whole Parliament, which will continue to fight for its application every step of the way, whether it means launching, reorientating or, if necessary, stopping a dialogue.

Luisa Morgantini, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank Mrs Valenciano very much because one of the things her weighty report highlights is the steps that the European Union still has to take in consultations on human rights, and thus the fact that this is a work in progress for all of us.

I believe that her request for greater consistency and transparency for all is vital, as well as greater involvement by civil society in foreign policy. Above all, it is important to confirm the end and not the beginning of a policy which in many cases is based on double standards. Mrs Flautre, for example, referred to the issue of torture.

It also seems to me very important to plan greater coordination between the various bodies and to create subcommittees, and above all to step up cooperation with national parliaments and the European Commission's delegations across the world.

I believe, however, that in the issue of double standards what is important is the fact that even we, acting as the European Union, do not implement the agreements we sign. I am thinking, for instance, of Article 2 of the association agreements. I agree, however, on a point put by Mrs De Keyser on the amendments made. We thank Mrs Valenciano for having accepted many of our amendments. Those tabled are negative except for one amendment, which was tabled not by any group but by Mrs Flautre, concerning increased monitoring and a greater presence and coherence in post-electoral phases.

I also believe, as Mrs Valenciano says, that the Commission and the Council ought to increase Parliament's involvement in the political dialogue process, take into account our opinion and provide us with more information, more consistently, both during and after negotiations with third countries, as provided for in any case by Articles 21 and 24 of the Treaty.

I also believe that, in general, the response to this issue needs to involve not only the announcement of actions, but also an investment in staff, which is extremely important. For example I recall, with sadness, a question put by the European Parliament recently: the Conference of Presidents rejected a request to have a committee on human rights with full powers. I believe that this was a mistake, because it would have been an excellent opportunity to see and give an idea of the strength and capacity of mainstreaming.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Madam President, the rapporteur has produced a significant report. The promotion of human rights in countries with which the EU has relations is a task it must perform responsibly. Structured human rights dialogues are indeed of great importance in this regard. Precisely because of this, and in connection with this report, it is sad to note that last May's Expert Seminar with China did not take place.

The maintenance of good Sino-European relations requires commitment on both sides, however. Recent alarming reports by organisations such as Amnesty International, Psy, Human Rights in China and Compass Direct give me cause to question this commitment. 'Opponents', including religious minorities and journalists, are banished to psychiatric institutions for political ends. The infamous Ankarang system is a reality in China, particularly in the run-up to the Olympic Games. That is most regrettable.

Therefore, I would ask the Council and the Commission to keep their fingers on the pulse with regard to the human rights situation in the Middle Kingdom. Maintaining harmonious relations with the strategic partner that is the People's Republic of China is important, but not at all costs, so that practice joins theory with regard to the following words of the report: 'whereas human rights dialogues [...] constitute an essential part of the European Union's overall strategy aimed at promoting sustainable development, peace and stability.'

Irena Belohorská (NI). – (SK) Firstly, I too would like to thank my fellow Member Mrs Valenciano for her work on a topic that represents the most important human rights tool and as such is very sensitive; unfortunately it does not often get the attention it deserves. That is why I agree with the point of view expressed in this report, namely that more attention should be paid to the reforms implemented by partner states in matters of human rights and democracy. I think that the European Union will have to do all in its power to develop a more efficient and unanimous response in the area of international cooperation and dialogue with third countries.

I am pleased that the report defends and endorses the systematic integration of the protection of the rights of women and children in all dialogues and consultations on human rights between the European Union and third countries. As a rapporteur for the Subcommittee on Human Rights, I am working on a strategy relating to the rights of children. In my report I stress the need for the individual provisions on children in armed conflicts to complement one other, and the need to take account of the Paris commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups.

I would like to emphasise the need to step up the controls over the assistance provided by the European Union, for example as a part of humanitarian aid, in order to avoid the possibility of funds provided by the European Union for education or medical care for children being used to buy small light arms that can be used by children. Dialogue must not be limited only to matters of democracy or protection of civic and political rights; it must also encompass those issues that directly concern the European Union, for example environmental issues or health protection issues. It is important to set clear criteria for the initiation, suspension or termination of a political dialogue and to define the goals we want to achieve.

In order to achieve our goals we must engage in a dialogue and not just dictate something unilaterally to third countries; we must endeavour to establish constructive cooperation; and we must cooperate with local human rights organisations and with non-governmental organisations operating in the countries in question. Additional EU financial support must be provided and it must be conditional on respect for human rights: payment of funds to countries where human rights are not observed must be stopped or suspended.

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the Valenciano Martínez-Orozco report on promoting human rights and democracy remains a fundamental cornerstone of the EU and the common values that unite the 27 Member States. It is also a key component externally in our strategic alliances beyond, in the wider 47-member-state Council of Europe, in our transatlantic partnership in NATO and with like-minded countries within the UN.

Inevitably, as the Union has progressed with more and more formal trade and political cooperation agreements, we have sought to impose a degree of fundamental human rights conditionality on our global partners – albeit it ad hoc and inconsistent at best – aided by a specific instrument, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, and supported by human rights dialogues and consultations when required.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), for which I am co-rapporteur for Parliament, aims at establishing a ring of neighbouring friends committed to a common area of peace, stability, security, full respect for human rights and democracy, freedom of the press, independence of the judiciary, the rule of law and prosperity. ENP action plans build on the existing, legally binding under the Treaty, contractual frameworks – association agreements in the case of Euromed partners or partnership and cooperation agreements with former Soviet states – which typically include human rights and democracy clauses that are monitored so that, the closer the ENP partner country comes in terms of shared values, the greater the aid and trade cooperation granted by the EU. These action plans are monitored by subcommittees as part of an ongoing dialogue.

Theoretically, at least, geopolitical considerations should play no part, but in fact *realpolitik* usually prevails in practice. Who, for instance, would dare threaten the same degree of sanctions against the People's Republic of China, as mentioned by my colleague Mr Belder, over its serious lack of human rights and democracy as we did against Uzbekistan? That is my case.

(Applause)

Józef Pinior (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, may I begin by congratulating my colleague Elena Valenciano Martínez-Orozco on preparing the report on the functioning of the human rights dialogues and consultations on human rights with third countries. Today's report concerns one of the European Union's most important policies. As far as the European Parliament is concerned, human rights policy is the trademark of European policy. Today's report deals with this area in an exceptionally profound and thorough way.

I wish to draw attention to the report's recommendations for the Council and the Commission. First of all we are highlighting the need for increased interinstitutional coherence, to find ways of improving coordination among the different EU institutions (the Council, the Commission and Parliament). Human rights policy really must be coordinated at a general EU level. We must put a stop to the practice whereby each of the most important EU institutions acts in this area in some sense, if I may use the phrase, on its own initiative.

Dialogue and consultation objectives should be based on the principle that human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent. We recommend that the criteria to be established should encompass not only civil and political rights, but also economic, social, environmental and cultural rights.

The report emphasises the enhancement of the European Parliament's role in EU human rights policy. This is a demand that reoccurs in every report accepted by this House in the area of human rights. The demand is clear – the European Parliament must be at the centre of a system of the most important European institutions, in which EU human rights policy is concentrated, as it is the institution that derives from democratic elections and possesses a political moral right to take a fundamental interest in this matter.

We also consider it essential to increase the role of interparliamentary assemblies and interparliamentary delegations in human rights dialogues and consultations.

Finally, we insist that women's rights are an integral part of human rights and urge the Commission to include the promotion and protection of women's rights explicitly and systematically in all areas relating to human rights that fall within the European Union's remit.

Lydie Polfer (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, I would first like to congratulate Mrs Valenciano on this report, which combines courage and ambition and I support her in all her proposals. Indeed, this report reaffirms the universality of human rights and anchors them as fundamental principles of the European Union's relations with third countries.

However, although it is important to affirm and reaffirm the universality of human rights today, it is just as important, and even high time, to shed another dogma of international politics, and this is the illusion we use too often to reassure ourselves, namely that economic development will lead to democratisation and the safeguarding of human rights. The last few decades paint a different picture. Indeed we must notice that there is a two-speed evolution going on: on the one hand, we are currently seeing rampant globalisation at the economic level, and on the other, the sudden surge in democratisation, which produced democracies in Europe, Latin America and East Asia at the end of the Cold War, seems to be running out of steam. Instead, we should be noticing that all over the world, economic growth and authoritarian regimes often go together. On the contrary, rapid economic growth even seems to give these regimes legitimacy and to contribute to the stabilisation of their power.

Today quite rightly we are focusing our interest and concern on the human rights situation in the large emerging countries such as China and Russia. Do not be deceived, though: several of the countries that number among the most developed in the world – including some that are our economic allies – do not respect the fundamental rights of their citizens. I am thinking particularly of Singapore, a country with a prosperous and modern economy, whose population benefits from all the advantages of a developed country except political freedoms, and more specifically, freedom of expression and assembly.

Madam President, if proof of this were still needed, it was given in a way that could not have been clearer by the behaviour of the Singapore authorities towards a delegation of MEPs from my group in April this year, a delegation of which I was a member. The local authorities prevented us from speaking at a meeting with members of the Singapore liberal party under threat of arrest.

This experience, as disturbing as it may have been, was also very revealing and it once again confirmed to me that protecting human rights does not necessarily go hand-in-hand with economic development, and that the European Union, as it happens, cannot just make do with an economic approach towards the countries concerned. On the contrary, the European Union should continue to play its role of defending human rights and to remind foreign leaders constantly that human rights are for all humans all over the world.

Marek Aleksander Czarnecki (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the promotion of human rights is the main pillar of the European Union's external policy. I agree with the rapporteur that the Council and the Commission should systematically incorporate human rights issues into the European Union's programme for political dialogue with third countries.

It would also be a good idea to ensure that human rights are more frequently incorporated into all areas of the Union's external policy, including the external aspects of its internal policy. All available instruments should be used to achieve this aim. In this respect I think it would be good to make more use of the European Parliament. For example, the Council could send Parliament and the relevant committee six-monthly evaluations of each dialogue and consultation held, together with an explanation that places emphasis on trends in the progress of work, and not on individual results.

It would also be appropriate to introduce a routine consultation session involving Members of the European Parliament after each round of dialogue and consultation. This would give Members the opportunity to take part in key decisions relating to the continuation or suspension of a specific dialogue. I also think that it would be a good idea to include Members in the decision-making process on the instigation of a new dialogue and to inform them about the aim, forms or procedures for its institution.

I also consider that, in order to make their actions more effective, the Council and the Commission should incorporate recommendations and conclusions in Parliament resolutions, especially resolutions on human rights, into their dialogue agendas.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Madam President, in the space of a minute and a half I would like to summarise some of the fundamental ideas that have led us not only to support, but also to clearly champion this initiative, and of course to congratulate Elena Valenciano on her work and on the capacity for reaching consensus that she has demonstrated.

I would also like to welcome the presence and interest shown by Mr Borg, as well as the presence of Mr Mattisen, but at the same time I regret the fact that the first two seats belonging to the Council are empty. I believe that the Council should have been present for this debate and as has already been said, this must be stated and reiterated.

The three topics that I think it is important to highlight, in any case, and which I would like to mention, are, firstly, the need, which we can never state strongly enough, to improve the consistency of these instruments, to reinforce the fact that we cannot, on the one hand, lament certain events, and on the other hand keep quiet when it suits our interests.

The second thing that I think is important, which has also been mentioned, but I would like to reiterate it, is the need for greater transparency in this type of mechanism, which requires increased participation by Parliament. It has been said many times that we are completely surprised, for want of a better word and to put it mildly, at what is missing from many of these debates, not only simply in terms of participation, but also in terms of the information that we often require.

Last but not least, is the important role in this report of the 14 paragraphs dedicated to the role of women in human rights, and as Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, I would like to celebrate the fact that many of the amendments that we discussed and adopted in committee have been taken on board.

(Applause)

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL). – (NL) Madam President, the widely supported emphasis on human rights is relatively new. Previously, this emphasis chiefly derived from socialist or liberal inspiration. The left was mainly concerned with the right to housing, income, facilities, codecision, a healthy environment, peace and liberation from colonial occupation – and all this not only for those already enjoying the right to it, but particularly for all those not yet able, or insufficiently able, to exercise that right. Liberals were chiefly

concerned with individual freedoms and the right of entrepreneurship. For some other political forces, human rights were less important.

Even now that there is greater agreement than before on the importance of human rights, there is still a gap between ideals and reality. Acting out of self-interest, the richest, most democratic countries tend to prioritise support to regimes that guarantee supplies of gas and oil and attempt at domestic level to destroy the movements that conflict most with Western interests. Applying double standards is an invitation to discredit justified criticism of some other countries as useless, arrogant interference.

The Valenciano Martínez-Orozco report rightly points out that endlessly pursuing human rights dialogues with reluctant governments is not a valid objective, and that such dialogues must not be allowed to founder in a lack of transparency and democratic control. This report enjoys a broad consensus; the suggested amendments primarily originate from three Flemish Members from the Identity, Tradition and Sovereignty Group in the European Parliament. The shortcomings they identify are mostly correct, but the wordings and deletions they suggest give the impression that this is not a matter of seeking solutions, but of being resigned to the lack of results. It is an illusion to believe that Europe would be better to shut itself off from the rest of the world in order to guarantee peace and quiet, prosperity and security on its own territory. Amendments that do not contribute to equality and democracy for all and to solidarity with the poor and hungry of the world will not have our support.

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). – Madam President, we in the EU set great store by human rights. We try to inspire the nations with which we interact to have a good level of human rights also. Dialogue is an important starting-point, but in this dialogue we must be willing to risk even economic advantage in order to speak courageously and truthfully.

China comes into this report; we know of serious cases of political and religious persecution there. Two years ago, in China, I met a psychiatrist who was chair of a disability organisation. Proudly, he told me that they had almost no one with Down syndrome in his city of over 10 million people, because they were not allowed to live.

This discrimination against persons with disabilities requires forthright dialogue, regardless of the economics between the EU and China.

On the issue of trade relations, in bringing pressure to bear on a government to improve its human rights, we must be willing to take decisive action, but careful that such actions do not make the situation of the poor in the country even worse.

Laima Liucija Andrikienė (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I find the report of Ms Valenciano Martínez-Orozco a comprehensive one, which clearly aims to strengthen and improve the European Union's extensive action on human rights dialogues and consultations on human rights with third countries.

Tonight we speak about one of the most important human rights instruments available to the European Union for promoting human rights in our relations with third countries. I appreciate the critical but also constructive way in which the challenges that the functioning of human rights dialogues has to face with regard to the overall perspective and interinstitutional cooperation are addressed by the rapporteur.

I fully endorse most of the recommendations put forward by the report and the resolution. I would especially like to draw your attention to the need to increase transparency and to adopt indicators for given benchmarks in order to achieve practical results that could be supported by other EU foreign policy tools.

I strongly support the recommendation to control the specific benchmarks for the EU-China dialogue on human rights as well as the EU-Russia consultations, hoping to develop them soon into a structured dialogue in order to assess the usefulness of human rights dialogues.

It is important also to apply and use the results of human rights dialogues in projects under the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and systematically to link those two tools.

I fully support the recommendation that the role and involvement of the European Parliament in interparliamentary assemblies in human rights dialogues can, in the said countries, be enhanced in the future.

Last but not least, human rights must be the cornerstone of our political message, and it is crucially important to develop our message through consistency, transparency and the strong political commitment of all European institutions and the Member States.

Evgeni Kirilov (PSE). – Madam President, now that the eight-year long duel over the Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian doctor in Libya has ended, I feel we are badly in need of a sober assessment of the human rights situation in that country.

Ms Valenciano Martínez-Orozco's report mentions the need to start a human rights dialogue with Libya. I support the need for a dialogue within the Barcelona process. However, let us be clear that we cannot forget or tolerate the fact that European citizens were abducted, tortured (as was acknowledged even by Colonel Gaddafi's son), kept in prison for eight years and subjected to a judicial process which was a farce, and then behave as if we should be grateful to, or reward, the Libyan side for letting them go in the end.

It has already vividly been reflected in the European media that this could turn into a case study for any dictatorship to focus attention and develop relations with the European Union. Moreover, Libya started a campaign against the President of Bulgaria for having pardoned the nurses after they returned to Bulgaria, as if it expected that we would send them to prison straight from the airport.

On the basis of the European Commission agreement with Libya, Bulgaria had to underwrite USD 56 billion of Libyan debt for the Benghazi fund. Other EU countries will spend even more. However, once again, let us be clear that this humanitarian aid is being used politically by the Libyan regime to hide the truth and blame the West for a plot to deliberately infect Arab children. This absurd accusation is still current.

Libya has not yet shown any intention of reform and we should not create the impression of applying double standards just because there is so much oil and gas in that country.

This is a test of the credibility of the European Union's human rights standards.

Sarah Ludford (ALDE). – Madam President, this excellent report by Ms Valenciano Martínez-Orozco brings together, in a comprehensive fashion, Parliament's analysis of the potential, but also unfulfilled potential, of the EU human rights dialogue. We demand action from the Council, sadly absent this evening. The EU's human rights strategy will never achieve optimum results without being organised in a systematic and coherent way, and without transparency and periodic review.

Of course our credibility on human rights depends on practising what we preach. How can we urge countries like Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Morocco or Algeria to end torture, when we know that the United States subcontracted torture to them and that European countries colluded with that? Instead of being credible, we become hypocritical. Our own House must be cleaned. The silence of the Council, since our report in February on extraordinary rendition, does not go unnoticed.

One of the strongest dialogues we should be having is with like-minded countries, and I therefore welcome paragraphs 115 and 116, which urge the EU to seek synergies and share experiences while addressing human rights concerns with the US, Canada, Japan and New Zealand.

But, in the last six years, while concerns about the war on terror have been shared by most European citizens, we have had no robust action by the EU to secure transatlantic respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law.

Of course, I am not saying the US is the worst human rights defender in the world. But it could be the model for human rights excellence and the tragedy is that the EU is not urging it in that direction. The Council's torture guidelines say the EU will make démarches and issue public statements urging relevant third countries to undertake effective measures against torture and ill-treatment. What démarches? What public statements about abductions, torture, Guantánamo Bay? There is just embarrassed silence.

Perhaps an article in this week's *Economist* magazine gives a clue. Headlined 'Czechs with few mates', it explains how the Czech Republic, in its three years of EU membership, has earned a reputation for promoting human rights at every turn. Great! Right on! Let us cheer! However, reading on, I learn that inside the Brussels foreign policy machine, such concerns are an irritant. EU diplomats apparently describe the Czech Republic as 'out on a limb', even 'unprofessional' – no doubt the most disdainful insult in the diplomat's armoury. Silly young Czechs! They believe the rhetoric about the EU being a human rights community. They thought Articles 6 and 7 of the EU Treaty, setting out our values of democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law, were there actually to be acted upon! But the old cynics in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Quai d'Orsay will put them right.

I am on the side of the Czech Foreign Minister, Karel Schwarzenberg, who sees no contradiction between being a friend of America and a critic of its human rights breaches. He opposes both the American trade

embargo on Cuba and Guantánamo Bay. 'I am against Guantánamo because I think it is a violation of human rights', he says crisply.

Mikel Irujo Amezaga (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Madam President, I would like to refer to three aspects of this magnificent report. Firstly, the role of Parliament in the democratic scrutiny of strategic documents relating to financial instruments on external assistance.

In the last plenary sitting we once again discussed and criticised the failure by the Commission to fulfil its commitment on transparency and parliamentary scrutiny in the context of the financing instrument for development cooperation. I hope that this is not going to be repeated in this area.

Secondly, I would like the Commission to be asked to inform Parliament as soon as possible as to when and how it proposes to put in place the post-electoral protocol mechanism in the framework of Election Observation Missions, proposed by this report.

Thirdly and finally, the report calls on the Council and the Commission to analyse, support and coordinate the setting of benchmarks for EU dialogues with actions of other donors and international organisations, especially the UN mechanisms in place.

Tomorrow an urgent resolution will be debated in this House on the financing of the special court to judge war crimes in Sierra Leone, set up by the United Nations. I consider this to be an example of the lack of coordination that currently exists between the EU and international organisations and a good example of the work that is still to be done.

I therefore hope that this report will be a step forward towards achieving this coordination.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, today a group of Yezidi Kurds demonstrated outside this House, and I joined them, along with Mrs Uca and others. This demonstration, by representatives of a group both dogged by terrorism and threatened with genocide, was another illustration of the incredible hope placed in this House with regard to human rights issues. This is why it is important that our human rights work is carried out systematically and sustainably, and that it avoids making certain mistakes.

The first serious mistake is to make a distinction between large and small countries where human rights is concerned, coming down hard on small countries and yielding to large ones with whom we share important economic and strategic interests. This is something that is done by many of our governments of all political orientations, but that this report avoids. In particular, the report very bravely addresses the subjects of China and Russia, and I am obliged to Mrs Merkel for stating in very clear language on her latest visit to China and a visit some time ago to Russia that it is possible to both pursue interests and in spite of this, or because of it, to raise the subject of human rights in clear terms.

The second mistake we must not make is the following. An Austrian writer, Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, once said that there are two types of oppressed community and individual victim: one with and one without sex appeal. One is in the limelight for a while, and the other is ignored. Human rights must apply to all, whether or not they are the focus of particular international attention at that time.

The third mistake we must avoid – and this too is vital – is introducing party politics into this issue. That is why I regret the speech by Mr Meijer, whom I otherwise hold in high esteem. Try asking Mr Kelam or Mr Landsbergis, who were under the threat of Soviet persecution, who it was who argued their case back then, in the 1980s: whether it was our group or Mr Meijer's. Imbalance and the tendency to abuse human rights for party political ends are found everywhere. We should avoid this course in favour of that taken in Mrs Valenciano's excellent report, and create a human rights policy that applies objective standards and crosses the group divide, and is worthy of the great human rights tradition of this House.

Katrin Saks (PSE). – (ET) I should like to thank the rapporteur for a good report and her high standard of teamwork. I would like to highlight two points concerning our human rights dialogue with third countries. In fact, I shall reiterate what the previous speaker said, but I believe it to be so important that it is worth repeating.

First of all, the point relating to conflicting interests and values, which is very important to me as well. It is no secret that in the race to a globalised world we have sought to give preference to our own interests and values. If we do not refer to and preach our own values then where our interests are pressing we will gradually forget them. I welcome the rapporteur's flexibility: we jointly presented proposals for amendments concerning

Russia and Central Asia. These are regions where interests often take precedence and our values have been left behind.

The European Union must remind its partners of the international arrangements and commitments entered into by them. As a Council of Europe rapporteur, I certainly think that interests come first for large States, yet at the same time we are very eager to single small States out; however, standards should be the same across the board.

Secondly, on a less important matter, I would like to refer to our conduct in relations with third countries and how this affects and supports human rights and related aims in host countries. We must always provide hope, and not do the opposite, namely take hope away from them. Each of the steps we take to tackle the sources of problems is observed with great care. I believe, for example, that support from the West was important and necessary for the Balts, for their ambitions, and I find the effective absence of that support depressing. In this regard too we should stress to our partners that they should comply with their obligations.

Finally, I repeat, this report covers those points and I thank the rapporteur once more for her high standard of teamwork.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, first of all I want to thank the rapporteur, Elena Valenciano Martínez-Orozco, for her excellent and properly focused report. It is very important for this European forum, the European Parliament, to deal with human rights. I am in firm agreement with the rapporteur when she says that human rights should be at the core of the EU's external policy.

When we talk of human rights, we have to remember that they should not be just the subject of mere rhetoric or just words used in political speeches and on special occasions. They should be a commonplace reality both within the European Union and in our relations with other countries – third countries.

What do human rights in all their aspects represent exactly? The way I understand it is that human rights are the inalienable rights a human being has from birth to death, including the rights of unborn children and the elderly. They include the rights of women, as has been said here, and the rights of children, but they also include the rights of the disabled, the sick, the elderly, everyone. We have to remember that every life is precious and unique. I would even say that every life is sacred, and nobody can take another person's life – take away their human rights.

If we in the European Union could share with others the notion that human value and human rights always win out against market value, we would be on the right tack, on the right road. Unfortunately, however, it would appear that we very often allow market value to supplant human rights. China provides many examples of this, and these are very obvious to us today. In addition, we now have the situation in Russia, for example, to take into account. What are human rights in Russia? We see them; we know of cases by name – Hodorovski and so on. What have we achieved as a European community of values? Obviously, we in a European community of values and the European Union have to practise what we preach and defend human rights and human values everywhere, inside the Union, but also in our relations with third and developing countries.

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE-DE). – (ES) Madam President, in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially in the last three decades, democracy and respect for human rights have made enormous progress, but there is still a great deal to be done.

A few months ago in Berlin, in the Declaration adopted on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, the EU institutions formally expressed their desire to promote freedom and democracy in the world.

In this policy we must work openly on the principle that respect for human rights affects the whole of the international community and that these rights are universal. These two ideas are expressly mentioned in the final document adopted at the New York Summit in 2005.

The theory that there are parts of the world which, for one reason or another, are exempt from observing human rights is not acceptable, in other words, the theory that there are regimes that cannot be required to respect freedoms.

I would like to recall here the brilliant essays by Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen on the global roots of democracy and democracy as a universal value. In short, the promotion of human rights should play a very important role in the EU's relations with all third countries.

One of the tools for this is dialogue, which is why I think it would be good to produce a report that helps to organise and systematise human rights dialogues that the European Union conducts with other countries.

I welcome the fact that paragraph 31 of the report calls on the Council to ensure that the initiation or suspension of a dialogue complies with clear criteria and for a prior impact assessment. I also agree that dialogue should not be an end in itself.

I would like to end by briefly talking about Cuba, which is not mentioned in the report, and where, unfortunately, human rights and basic freedoms are still not respected. However, the Council recently decided to propose initiating a comprehensive dialogue with Cuba that would include these rights.

It is well known that the position of the majority of Parliament is that it does not agree with the somewhat erratic policy that the Council has been following in the last three years with the Castro regime. In our view, the priority before any other initiative, should be firm insistence on the freeing of political prisoners.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). – (PT) Congratulations to my colleague, Mrs Valenciano, on her important report making concrete proposals to involve Parliament in the political dialogues on human rights held by the Council and the Commission.

That is not merely a question of trying to strengthen the EU as a global player at inter-institutional level. It is a question of trying to reap the benefit of the added value which the European Parliament's participation could bring to the substance of those dialogues and to the practical results they contribute to an area in which the insensitivity and diffidence of various European governments and bodies strikes an unfortunate contrast with the commitment and historic leadership of the European Parliament, the body representing the voice of the citizens of Europe.

It has to be admitted that there are many cases of inconsistency which detract from Europe's credibility. Only this morning in the debate on terrorism I criticised the European governments' collaboration with the Bush Administration's programme of trade in torture.

But, let us also consider European development policy, which is supposed to promote good governance and therefore human rights. The current Portuguese Presidency is even aiming to strengthen European relations with Africa in this context. Why do the Commission and the Council fail to make even the most basic use of the instruments already available to them, such as the Cotonou Agreement, which has specific articles on the subject of human rights?

It is already clear today to 77 million Ethiopians and many more millions of Africans that the EU does not take the Cotonou Agreement seriously. Thirty-eight elected members of parliament, journalists and activists imprisoned in Ethiopia following the 2005 elections, monitored by a European Union Mission, were released recently thanks to repeated pressure from this Parliament and in the face of an incomprehensible silence on the part of the Council.

Others, however, remain imprisoned, such as Netsanet Demissie and Daniel Bekele. Will they ever be able to believe in the Cotonou Agreement and in the EU? Examples of failure to act or even nauseating grovelling on the part of EU representatives abound throughout the world – from Addis Ababa to Beijing, from Moscow to Riyadh and from Teheran to Havana.

Let us hope that the reports of a European Commissioner recently apologising to the Government of Sudan in order to avoid the expulsion of local Commission delegates prove unfounded.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE). – (SV) Madam President, in a world where democracy and human rights are not always evident – among our neighbours and sometimes in certain countries which, whilst not members of the EU, are still part of our Europe – the EU's relations with the world around take on even greater importance. Each such relationship, whether in the form of a meeting, a dialogue or an agreement, is an opportunity to assert our values and impose demands on countries which still do not live up to the meaning of the words humanity, human rights and democracy.

The report we are considering today is essentially good. It illustrates some of the difficulties that arise when you deal with different wordings and approaches to human rights, but I still think that it should have been more critical as regards our attitude towards China or Russia, for example. It is our duty to be critical of countries that do not respect human rights and that are not democratic, but it is absolutely essential that we criticise countries that believe themselves to be democracies – not only for the sake of our own credibility

but also for all the people who live in those countries and who do not even have the opportunity to voice their criticisms.

Democracy and human rights in the EU are a given, so we sometimes think that they have always existed, they exist now and will always exist. But we who were born in dictatorships know that we must fight for democracy and human rights every day. It is not enough to say that human rights work is taking place and that things are improving. There is also much to be done, as we so often say. In our dialogues we must be much clearer and much more specific, both in our criticism and in our demands, and we must start to tell things as they are if we want to leave a better world for our children.

Pierre Schapira (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, at this late hour, many things have already been said, but I would really like to thank Mrs Valenciano, of course, for this report. It marks an important step in making European development policy more transparent and effective when it comes to human rights.

I am also taking the chance offered by this debate to call representatives of the Council and the Commission to better interinstitutional cooperation. It is indeed essential to institute a dialogue between the Council, the Commission and Parliament so that action taken in the area of human rights can be better coordinated, and to prevent contradiction and duplication from interfering with the message to the outside world.

It is unfortunately an issue permanently in the news. To take a specific example, that of Burma, our policy concerning the country is indecipherable from the outside. The members of the EU have committed themselves to a common position in favour of national reconciliation, democracy and human rights, but in practice the EU Member States are divided, producing a weak and ineffective position that is having no effect on the regime in Burma.

Politically, the European Union has no clear strategy. We concentrate only on humanitarian aid, which is obviously essential, but not enough. We have not taken a position on how the UN Security Council should deal with the situation in Burma, offering no support for a resolution. Moreover, the Commission has reduced the amount of subsidies for projects aimed at promoting human rights and democracy in Burma. In short, the European Union has not used its influence positively and effectively to promote and support democracy and human rights in that country.

The recent failure of our call for the release of the Burmese Nobel prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, proves this. Yet Parliament awarded her the Sakharov Prize in 1990. This example perfectly illustrates the fact that our three institutions must act together in presenting a coherent, intelligible policy for the defence of human rights.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE). – (PT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the report we are debating deserves our support in the first place because it examines in great breadth and detail a topic which is highly relevant for the European Union's external dimension and I should like, therefore, to congratulate the rapporteur.

The worst thing that could happen for the European Union's commitment to the global promotion of fundamental human rights would be for this to become an isolated question, dealt with separately. The alternative, the right option I think, is to regard the promotion of human rights as both an ethical duty, for reasons which are self-evident, and as in the EU's interest insofar as the instability, migratory flows and political and military tensions linked to human rights violations give rise to crises which make the world a more dangerous place.

I therefore agree with the fundamental question, but we ought to look into the question of the method. If the EU were to maintain relations only with countries that respect human rights as we defend them, then our firm relations would extend to only a few countries. Conversely, if the European Union were always to opt for the realism of economic, energy, geostrategic and other interests, it would soon discover that rather than defending immediate advantages it was actually creating greater dangers for the future.

What we must hope for is a coherent EU strategy which includes the tangible and quantifiable promotion of human rights on its foreign policy agenda. It is not an option to allocate budgetary funds without evaluating the result of their application or to pay lip service to proposals which are never realised.

In this connection, the next EU-Africa Summit is an opportunity not to be missed. If we wish to help Africa and the Africans – and we do – we must be generous and demanding in equal measure. We do not, as I said, delude ourselves that we can only forge relations with countries which respect fundamental values, but we must maintain the conviction that the human rights agenda is part of our policy for relations with those

countries. Otherwise we should be yielding to the force of some dictator and giving a signal, not of our goodwill but of our lack of political capability and negotiating strength

A better world, Madam President, is a safer world and Europe cannot confuse the soft power of its diplomacy with dream power, or worse still, with no power at all.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) I warmly congratulate Mrs Valenciano on her excellent report; she has put forward some very important proposals. At the same time I would like to point out several gaps, which are not her fault but which represent conceptual shortcomings by the European Parliament and the European Union.

To take the example of China, we rightly protest against the violation of human rights or the restriction of freedom of religion but we never mention the 700 million people living in villages who have no social security and no pension. I would ask: is this not an important human right? I would go further. In the entire report there was not a single mention of the question of national minorities in China.

The European Union should now finally wake up to the fact that, whether in the Western Balkans or anywhere in the world, if it wants stability then it must be honest in its dealings with the issue of minorities, and national minorities. The European Parliament needs to attend several seminars in the Council of Europe building to learn at last that human rights and minority rights are two completely different issues!

It is unacceptable that in the entire report there was no mention of the issue of national minorities, and no mention of the issue of migrant minorities or western European migrant minorities; only today, in this very House, I have said that in France, Great Britain and the Netherlands the integration of new minorities is in crisis. Thus if the European Parliament and the European Union do not change their approach, they will be incapable of managing international problems and international conflicts and will not have the moral high ground for judging China legitimately; we should be putting our own house in order, with our own insoluble minorities issues, here in Europe.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). – Madam President, there has not been sufficient consistency in the EU dialogues with third countries and such a situation may undermine the very credibility of the EU's human rights policy. These are two conclusions of this report.

Therefore, our message to the Commission and the Council is very clear: human rights issues should be upgraded into practical policymaking. In other words, they should not be conditioned by strategic or geopolitical interests.

The biggest challenge remains implementing these noble goals in our current relationships. There is clearly a conflict of interest and views in the EU relations with the Kazakh dictatorship. In the case of China and Russia, expressing the right concern about the situations there, we should also ask whether the dialogues as they have been conducted so far have produced a real improvement in the situation.

Also, speaking of Russia, that country should stop claiming that the EU-Russia partnership is founded on shared values. In the present situation, it sounds rather ironic. We need to call things as they are, as Putin's Russia is probably where Hitler's Germany was in the mid-1930s.

Not addressing these realities with all the power and authority of the EU makes us share responsibility for the brutal violation of human rights in Russia.

At the same time, Mr Schröder called on the EU not to burden Russia with exaggerated demands about human rights and democracy there. Unfortunately, the fact is that the EU still lacks real grip while trying, with the best of intentions, to balance human rights and its economic and strategic interests.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (PSE). – (LT) You can never give too much attention to human rights dialogue, and therefore I would like to welcome a speaker who has presented many suggestions and assessments. The European Parliament wants to, and can, participate more actively in the Council and Commission dialogue with third countries on the issue of human rights because it has the necessary potential and experience. The creativity and independence of MEPs can supplement the realism of the Commission and the Council. We need to talk ever more loudly about the status of human rights defenders and the environment in which they work and also about economic, social and ecological human rights. Although relations between the EU and the United States are overshadowed by the Iraq War and Guantanamo, they are healthy because of our common values. The EU and Russia are linked by gas and oil pipelines, but human rights dialogue in Russia cannot be softened by energy sources and mercantile interests. This large and important country is searching

for a national idea and a special path. Here I might mention a comment heard in Moscow: earlier we mistakenly thought that we were on the right path in Russia; now we mistakenly think that we are on a special path. Nobody argues against Russia's right to travel down a specific path, if the majority of citizens want this. It is another thing altogether if this is accompanied by restrictions on freedom of expression and of the press and NGO activity or exceptions for certain parties. A human rights dialogue is not being sought with Belarus; however, I believe that not only the human rights defenders in that country, but also the EU are interested in this. The reason for which we actively criticise Belarus also applies to certain countries in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus that even participate in the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, greater losses and the smell of oil and gas should not soften attitudes towards the violation of human rights.

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I have to say that this was not an easy report to wade through. It was excessively long and duplicative, but it deals with an important subject.

I am a staunch defender of genuine human rights. But I must confess I have difficulty with the extension of the concept to cover just about every conceivable aspect of human activity: social, environmental, economic and cultural rights, to name but a few that are repeatedly referred to.

Nevertheless, the abuse of human rights throughout the world has never received as much attention as it does today, but paradoxically this has not led to change for the better in many countries where the worst abuses take place. The EU has an important role to play in promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights, but its habit of flouting its own rules does nothing to encourage reform among the worst regimes. In this regard I think especially of Zimbabwe and Burma, in relation to which the EU's own travel ban and targeted sanctions have been ignored on spurious grounds on several occasions. And we wonder why our measures are ineffective and tyrants laugh at us!

Many African countries have not responded to their obligations to deliver good governance. It is not surprising if there is no strong message on this from EU interlocutors.

For years now we have tried to get other African countries to join with us in bringing about change for the better in Zimbabwe, but to no avail. Meanwhile, that country plunges into economic chaos and millions of its people are left starving and destitute under Mugabe's arrogant dictatorship.

It now seems there is a possibility that the EU will again break its own rules and invite Mugabe or other banned Zimbabwean ministers to the EU-Africa summit in Lisbon in December.

I wrote to the Prime Minister of Portugal about this on 3 July. I have not yet received a reply. As the Council is not here at the moment, perhaps the Presidency could find out what it intends to do on this subject? I hear from a report yesterday that Ms Ferrero-Waldner, the Commissioner for External Relations, has said that maybe they would invite the Foreign Minister instead of Mugabe! Well, he is banned as well; he is number 83 on the banned list. So could we actually be told what is going to happen in this regard?

Gabriela Crețu (PSE). – (RO) Mr President, dear colleagues, stating that woman's rights are an integral part of human rights could be considered as a tautology because, they would be inherent. Reality shows that they are only explicitly ignored. We have recently inventoried the delays in attaining the Millennium Development Goals in which women are a target group but also essential factors for process acceleration.

In Elena Valenciano's excellent report, the Commission and the Council are requested to consider the gender dimension in dialogue with partner countries. However, in a dialogue there are at least two parties involved and we represent one of them. We think that the efficiency of the measures to promote and defend woman's rights as well as the control of their implementation also depend on the European parties, institutions and our governments' sensitivity towards gender issues. It is conditioned by the achievement of their own goals set out in the roadmap for gender equality.

We do not need to invent sophisticated indicators to observe that in the European Union there are governments where there is no woman or others that uncritically defend traditions and practices violating woman's rights. We all know that the decision to initiate a dialogue on human rights is taken based on several criteria laid down by the Council when certain situations are considered worrying in the partner country.

Even in the optimistic case that all the Council members are supporters of woman's rights, I am wondering what kind of example we set for a country to which one requests measures on representation in political structures. Unfortunately the remark is valid also for the European Parliament where there is a great reserve that the reform of our own structures include a balanced gender balance.

We request coherence between statements and acts from the European institutions and member states. It is necessary to preserve coherence between Community policies and instruments so that they do not negatively interfere with the capability measures of women in partner countries. Talking about women is important but letting them talk is even more important in order to improve the political climate, peace processes and to reduce corruption all over the world.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, the report presented has my full approval, particularly as it relates to one of the most pressing problems facing not only the Union, but the world as a whole. The quality of dialogue and consultation with third countries in the area of human rights depends primarily on coherence and transparency in action. I would like to stress that the road to maximising the benefit of dialogue lies in tightening up cooperation, especially where the Union decision-making triangle is concerned. We need to specify precisely the aims we are hoping to achieve.

The suggested increase in coherence should also extend to the common practice of separating human rights dialogue from other bilateral relations. Admittedly the report does emphasise that hypocrisy of this kind should be eliminated in the case of China. However, it is not sufficiently strongly worded as far as relations with Russia are concerned. The criteria we apply to the subject of human rights should be clearly laid down for all countries, and most importantly they should be identical.

I am sorry to say that this rule is quite often broken. Universally accepted standards are selectively applied, depending on the payback that can be achieved from this sort of action. That is how the situation looks with regard to Russia, as I have said, with the European Union being Russia's main trading partner. Mutual benefits do undoubtedly flow from this fact. However, we cannot allow the relativisation of human rights to come at the expense of good trading relations. I hope I do not need to remind you that in the Russian Federation the use of torture and persecution against a racial background is widespread, as in Chechnya, while the organisation 'Reporters Without Borders' places this country 147th in the world press freedom ranking, which is dangerously close to such countries as China and North Korea.

The consequence of which I am speaking also relates to Cuba, which, incidentally, is not mentioned in this report. Like Russia, the European Union, as the main trading partner, appears to be closing its eyes to the things that go on there. Despite the June resolution, no specific action has been taken. We read from time to time that the European Parliament is demanding something or another, or deplores something, but do we think about what happens as a result? The Sakharov Prize has still not been awarded to the Women in White from Havana.

A further and highly significant element in the area of human rights is the need to sharpen up the instrument that governs the finding and distribution of financial aid to the opposition in countries with an inadequate level of democracy. I would particularly like to emphasise how important it is to properly identify needs. Opposition groups are often characterised by a weak level of formalisation. We must do everything in our power to ensure that money reaches the right people, and not those in authority. Please take it from me, I know this situation from my own personal experience, and for such people specific actions are of far greater value than resolutions and assurances.

I would like to take advantage of this discussion on human rights to draw your attention to the situation of Christians in Middle Eastern countries. We are receiving alarming information about this. In August two Christian activists from the Middle East Christian Association were arrested and accused of posting aggressive anti-Islamic messages. In Algeria the government has restricted religious freedom for non-Muslims, and this has had a direct impact on Christians living in that country. Repression by increasingly radical Muslims is also affecting Christians in such countries as Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon.

Joe Borg, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I appreciated the exchange of views on the report, which testify the commitment of Parliament to the cause of human rights.

Inspired by the debate, I would like to convey the Commission's comments on the recommendations for increased transparency of the dialogue and involvement of the European Parliament and of civil society organisations in all aspects of dialogue and consultation – a point a number of interventions have referred to.

While some of the report's recommendations are already becoming part of normal practice, such as those concerning briefings and debriefings, the three institutions should carefully consider the different suggestions and find solutions, while taking into account the EU legal framework and the arrangements between Parliament and the Commission, which are foreseen in the framework agreement of May 2005.

In doing so, we should be pragmatic. On one hand, this means not hiding behind regulations and 'business-as-usual' excuses, and, on the other hand, carefully evaluating the political opportunity and the consequences of increased transparency on the effectiveness of the dialogue and the readiness of third countries to engage in the dialogue in the first place.

The impact on the actual dialogue and on relations with third countries should be carefully weighed, to avoid depriving the European Union of an effective instrument.

In all cases, I am confident that we will be able to find the appropriate arrangements to both satisfy the need for information and to preserve and increase the effectiveness of the instrument.

On the issue raised on including human rights in trade and sectoral agreements, the Commission considers that there is no need to replicate the human rights clause contained in the association agreement, partnership and cooperation agreement or sectoral agreements.

The absence of such a clause in sectoral agreements does not prevent us from carrying out human rights consultations with the country in question or to use any other of the instruments of the European Union human rights toolbox.

On the subject of cooperation programmes for democracy and human rights, the Commission would like to remind Parliament that the new instrument, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, foresees specific funds for projects in difficult countries such as Cuba and Burma/Myanmar, mentioned in this debate.

On the issue of the universality of human rights, let me emphasise that the European Union subscribes to the principle of the universality, indivisibility, interdependency and interrelation of all human rights.

According to this principle, proclaimed by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, human rights are dealt with globally in a fair and equal manner on the same footing and with the same emphasis. Of course, this does not exclude the fact that, in a session, a particular set of rights receives more attention because of events on the ground or because of the readiness of our dialogue partners to address certain issues instead of others.

The Commission is particularly pleased to see that the report devotes several recommendations to women's rights and to their inclusion in dialogues. We should also not forget other sets of rights and groups that deserve attention.

On the question of electoral observer missions, the Commission agrees that political dialogue, and in particular human rights dialogue, offers the opportunity to plead with partner countries for the follow-up to EU electoral observer missions' recommendations. In that context, the Commission has also advocated the continuous engagement of the European Union Head of Missions.

This follow-up should focus on actions by the political and electoral authorities concerned and on an active role for civil society and democracy promotion, including electoral reform.

The Commission is not convinced of the need to put in place a specific and separate post-electoral protocol mechanism for that purpose. The Commission takes the view that assistance, dialogue instruments and monitoring mechanisms exist, in order to ensure post-electoral strategies and democracy support, and these mechanisms should continue to be used.

With regard to the specific question by Mr Van Orden, I will convey his concern and question to Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, who do doubt will provide you with an answer.

To conclude, let me state that I have taken note of the many other specific comments made on particular situations. I assure you that such comments will be forwarded to Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, who will certainly give them due consideration.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday 6 September 2007.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Alessandro Battilocchio (NI), in writing. – (IT) I would like to give my sincere thanks to the rapporteur for her work, because I think it is of fundamental importance to adopt a consistent European policy on human

rights and democracy when participating in international dialogue. Too often, in fact, arguments based on economic and strategic interests have prevailed over the good intentions and European values declared in this Chamber. With particular reference to economic and trade agreements with third countries or WTO negotiations, the EU sometimes pays insufficient attention to the rights of workers, minorities, women and children outside the EU, becoming a tacit accomplice in criminal atrocities and intolerable practices. A European social, economic and energy policy that made the EU more independent in terms of human and energy resources would also help Europe to rid itself of certain geopolitical ties that in some situations compel it to keep silent on human rights. Finally, many EP resolutions and declarations on particular situations often go unheard: it is important for both the Council and the Commission to pay more attention to calls by MEPs, who give a voice to requests by persons or ethnic groups otherwise excluded from any form of communication.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka (UEN), in writing. – (PL) Among the many good things that are mentioned in this report, the fact that it calls on the Council and the Commission to involve Parliament more fully in preparing and following up dialogues with third countries is worthy of particular praise. The European Parliament is, after all, an institution whose opinion on human rights matters is held in high regard throughout the world.

We should not forget, however, that dialogue with countries outside the Union must not become an end in itself. It should be categorically emphasised that human rights cannot play a part in any negotiations or haggling with a diplomatic or economic basis. Infractions of these rights cannot be tolerated, and the European Union, together with its agencies, must defend this principle absolutely in the light of the historical, cultural and moral values by which it is guided.

What we need to do essentially is to exert a constant and consistent influence on such countries as Russia or China, with which an institutionalised dialogue has already been in progress for some time. It is essential to monitor the results of settlements and obligations agreed by them during successive rounds of consultations, as it is only in this way that real progress can be achieved. In this context it is pleasing that the report mentions areas in which these countries still have much to do. Sadly, though, there are still a great many problems like these.

15. Sustainability in EU fisheries through maximum sustainable yield (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0298/2007) by Mrs Fraga Estévez, on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries, on the implementation of sustainable fishing in the EU on the basis of maximum sustainable yield (2006/2224(INI)).

Carmen Fraga Estévez (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – (ES) Madam President, allow me to say, first of all, that today a Spanish fishing boat sank off the Andalusian coast and as a result three people died and five are currently missing. I ask Parliament to stand with the families in their sorrow and the desire for the missing sailors to be rescued.

I will now move on to the report that we are discussing today. The first thing that I would like to point out, as the Commission itself recognises and Parliament has stated on numerous occasions, is the clear failure of the Community fisheries management system, which over the many years it has been in existence has not ensured the sustainability of resources, and has done even less to support an efficient and profitable fisheries sector.

Paradoxically, the management system is the only one that was not a fundamental part of the major reforms of 2002 and, because of this, the Commission has to paper over the cracks here and there, dealing with unsustainable discards, inventing control measures day after day and establishing recovery plans, but without tackling the substantive issue: establishing a coherent and up to date framework for the fisheries management model.

This is the context in which we have received the Commission communication, which opts for maximum sustainable yield as the yardstick for long-term fishing activities, a theoretical model that seeks to combine the most efficient exploitation of a species with guaranteeing biological sustainability. The problem is that maximum sustainable yield, which, as an intellectual and theoretical concept may be irreproachable, has been found to have more than a few contradictions in its practical application, and, in fact, a large proportion of the scientific community now considers it to have been largely superseded.

The issue is therefore one of redefining the model in such a way that it can be adapted to the reality of fishing communities. This is where a series of questions arise as to how to do this, which the report that we are

presenting today has sought to highlight, and which are not in any way answered in the Commission communication, which is very ambiguous and vague.

It is clear that here we are not criticising the Commission's intention to impose a new management model, but its inability to explain to us how it is going to overcome the difficulties of putting it into practice and avoid the pitfalls that exist in the actual formulation of maximum sustainable yield. Among these, we know that maximum sustainable yield requires long series of reliable, accurate scientific data, while for the vast majority of species, it is not possible to have this degree of certainty.

Secondly, the model was created based on the exploitation of a single population, while the large majority of Community fisheries are multi-species, which means over- or under-fishing many of them, which is obviously contrary to the actual definition of maximum sustainable yield. It also does not work for pelagic species, and we also now know that other factors influence the status of populations, such as errors in recruitment or environmental factors, which may result in incorrect definitions of maximum sustainable yield.

What is certain is that strict application of maximum sustainable yield will, in the short term, result in a sometimes drastic reduction in fishing opportunities, and therefore in the activity, income and employment of the Community fleet.

Madam President, allow me to thank all my colleagues for their contributions and to request the adoption of a report by means of which the Committee on Fisheries wishes to call on the European Commission first to clear up all these uncertainties before forcing the introduction of a type of model for some species of great economic importance whose effectiveness is, for many fisheries, scientifically and economically questionable. The committee also wishes to call on the Commission to first seriously look at a clear fisheries management system, with an eco-system-based focus, and then to decide on how to adapt the reference points and the chosen model, whether this is based on MSY or something else. This should not be done - and I must stress this point - without first carrying out a social and economic analysis of the repercussions of implementing it and measures to counter its impact. All these questions are currently of great concern to our sectors and to us.

Joe Borg, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, first of all allow me to thank the rapporteur, Ms Fraga Estévez, and all the members of the Committee on Fisheries for a very thorough report on the implementation of sustainable fishing based on maximum sustainable yield (MSY).

I am pleased to see that we are in broad agreement, in particular on the need to move away from annual decision-making allowing for a more gradual approach and for better planning by the sector. A longer-term approach will also allow for more stability and sustainability in the exploitation of fisheries resources.

I am sure that we are in agreement on the objectives of urgently taking measures to improve the very poor state of fisheries resources in Europe in order to bring the stocks to sustainable levels, which, at the same time, will improve the profitability of the fishing industries in the long term.

Apart from the benefits to industry, there is an international political commitment that should be met. In particular I appreciate and share the Committee on Fisheries' view that the common fisheries policy needs a new management model for the setting of fishing opportunities, the recovery of depleted stocks and the adaptation of fishing effort levels to sustainable and profitable levels.

Also, and very importantly, adjusting fishing efforts to MSY levels is the single most important action that can be taken to reduce discarding in European waters.

I am aware that there are concerns too. I share many of these concerns and know they will need to be addressed. First of all, I know that evaluating MSY is not a simple matter. There are scientific uncertainties and the matter is complicated because of eco-system effects and mixed fisheries issues.

Fisheries science is not yet able to predict accurately what MSY for any particular stock or mixture of stocks will be. But we must not only look at the difficulties. Science can tell us in which direction fisheries should move in order to improve yields and decrease costs. Even if the destination is imprecise, the direction is known quite well.

We should start to move in the right direction and progressively evaluate and review the MSY reference points as fisheries develop.

Mixed fishery situations need to be studied carefully and the best possible solutions identified in relation to the potential yield of the whole fisheries system.

This progressive approach will allow environmental, economic and social aspects to be explored. It is also the approach that has been adopted in the long-term plan for plaice and sole in the North Sea, which was adopted this year and which I consider to be a good model for the implementation of this approach. As your report stresses, it is an urgent matter to start moving in the right direction.

Let me underline here that the long-term management plans in practical terms move fisheries management in the right direction: that is, away from over-exploitation and not necessarily to a fixed MSY target.

The plans include provisions for regular revisions of the targets that allow for the adaptation of MSY targets where necessary, for example, where there is a change in the natural environment or where there is a revision of the scientific advice.

Secondly, I agree that it is important to address fisheries issues on a local basis and to involve the stakeholders in the important decisions concerning the choice of objectives, the rate at which we should move towards those objectives and the right combination of measures to take such as tax, effort management and technical adaptations.

The Commission will only prepare MSY plans on a regional basis and only after a detailed consultation with the sectors involved. The region advisory councils will play an important role here and their work has already begun. Economic and social analyses are also important in this process and the Commission will accompany all proposals for management plans with impact assessments where economic, social and environmental aspects of the proposals will be analysed.

Increased support for fisheries research is a necessary part of the development of MSY plans. The framework programmes, the work of the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries and the support of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea will all be important in this context, which will be a priority area for the next years.

Moving to MSY fisheries will, in many cases, mean adjustments of fleet capacity and reductions in fishing effort. The European Fisheries Fund was designed so that Member States can plan the development of the national fleet capacity and use co-funding from the Community budget to help adjust the fleet size according to long-term objectives and taking appropriate social and economic provisions into account.

I would also like to say a few words in relation to the three amendments proposed by Mr Schlyter. The Commission believes that a gradual approach to moving to MSY conditions should in fact be a general rule. There is no need in all cases to move drastically to MSY. As regards scientific methodology for reaching MSY, the Commission will ask for scientific advice on a case-by-case basis. We should not prejudice the scientific debate by prejudging which methods may be better than others.

Lastly, as I have already stated, it is correct to say that the European Fisheries Fund provides for Member States to allocate public aid so as to restructure fishing fleets in line with MSY strategies. This, however, should not be seen as compensation, because the fishing industry will be the eventual beneficiaries of the new policy but as a financial incentive to make the transition.

The Commission will continue the dialogue with the fisheries sector and will start to discuss specific long-term plans for a number of fisheries with an MSY perspective. Implementing such plans will improve the stability and the productivity of stocks and of the industry.

I look forward to more discussions with you about these plans at a later date, after the Commission has developed impact assessments, consulted the industry and prepared our proposals. There is a lot of work to be done and I will be very grateful for your support in developing this policy area.

Avril Doyle, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Madam President, I welcome Ms Fraga Estévez's report, and particularly her highlighting of concerns on this proposal from the Commission, as I have serious reservations about the Commissioner's proposals to adopt a maximum sustainable yield (MSY) model as the reference point for managing fish stocks.

The year 2015 is a political date, not a scientific one. It is too early for some stocks and is too late for others in the context of overfishing. While the proposal aims to maximise the economic yield of a fishery, and also maintain the capacity of the stock to produce maximum sustainable returns in the long-term, I fear that, far from reducing the levels of discarded catch, critical flaws in the model may cause over-exploitation, as the

underlying assumptions used for calculating levels of catch are based on single-species, shallow-water fisheries and do not take account of geographic and biological diversity.

I applaud the objective of increasing efficiency in protecting fish species, as all of us must do. But I believe that the Commission has not sufficiently researched this. There has been no in-depth evaluation of the risks of error in the MSY model. Moreover, for the large majority of scientists and also for the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the traditional MSY model has been superseded by new cutting-edge approaches which encompass the ecosystem as a whole, rather than relying on an outdated concept of animal population dynamics.

MSY is a blunt instrument, based on harvesting surplus production during high growth of population before it reaches carrying capacity. But it is one which can lead to overfishing when applied to multi-species fisheries, as you cannot obtain optimum levels of all species at the same time, or when it is applied to pelagic species that dwell in deep seas and open water such as the North Sea and the Atlantic.

If adopted, this model will simultaneously result in the collapse of stocks and the collapse of the market. I urge the Commissioner to take a sound, scientific and evidence-based approach. Your own words, Commissioner, are that you should not prejudice the scientific debate. I agree with you. Take a scientific, evidence-based approach and re-examine this proposal rather than – with respect – just dance, albeit belatedly, to the tune of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

Paulo Casaca, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, Chairman of the Committee on Fisheries, I should like to begin by congratulating the rapporteur on her excellent work and also by congratulating the Commission for its communication which meets one of the requirements which it itself approved at the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit and also corresponds to the first of the eight objectives outlined at that conference. The European Commission has certainly already accomplished a great deal within the scope of those eight objectives, but I would remind the Commissioner that we are in 2007 with objectives outlined for 2015 by a Summit which took place in 2002. The fact that we are still debating this communication at this stage does not seem to constitute a sufficiently rapid response to the scale of the challenges facing us.

I am delighted at what the Commissioner said with regard to the need for a new management model and, since the proposal places the emphasis on the concept of ecosystem management, I think we are well on the right track. However, if we regard this concept of maximum sustainable yield as something radically new, we are mistaken, since that concept, which is a theoretical concept, was always the concept underlying the setting of all quotas and TACs, which could only be set on the basis of that concept. The problem is that application of that concept entails many problems which were, moreover, very well described by our rapporteur and by our colleague, Mrs Doyle, and we cannot merely base our actions on blind application of the concept, but must try to improve its effectiveness, checking where it failed and where it produced good results and I do not sincerely believe that this communication has achieved that; we must use all other additional means to go further.

This then is the challenge facing the Commission, which we hope will bring us some good news before long.

Chris Davies, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – Madam President, I regret that this is one of those occasions when I am delighted that Parliament has so few powers in this field, especially as there is a real possibility that this report might be carried in the vote tomorrow.

If so, it may well be that some people will say, 'well, Parliament has called on the Commission to look again at its proposals'. I would not like that public relations gesture to be made; I want the Commission to know that there are at least some MEPs who thoroughly disagree with what is being proposed here.

The Commission's report back in 2006 was weak – motherhood and apple pie stuff, frankly – and was hardly worth putting on paper. There were plans, plans and plans being proposed but precious little by way of action. However, what is being proposed here by the rapporteur – by Parliament – is, to my mind, even worse. I look at one paragraph in particular: 'Considers that the time is not ripe to propose the introduction of a maximum sustainable yield [MSY] system'. Apparently, we need more analysis. So, while the Commission wants plans, we simply want more talk about plans. When is something going to get done? If this is carried tomorrow by Parliament, then I hope the Commission will disregard it entirely because I regard this as completely irresponsible.

There is a question, a legitimate question, about the methodology to be applied in achieving the status of MSY. Frankly, we know what is needed; this is just playing with words half the time. If two thirds of the fish stocks are being fished beyond safe biological means, then you have to stop the fishing; you have got to put the fleets on the side, you have got to put fishermen out of work, perhaps with compensation, until such time as we have restored the stocks and given everyone the chance of a long-term, healthy future. You have got to allow the fish stocks to recover.

Frankly, we can debate the details of how we achieve perfection in MSY status when we have got the fish and the long-term security of having that fish firmly secured.

Commissioner, I have the highest respect for you; ever since we first met, I have liked what you have said. May I say two things? First of all, I think your profile is too low; I think your cabinet keeps you in meetings in the back room. I think Europe needs a champion for its fish and, just as you need to sort some problems out, you also need to be in front of Europe's television cameras saying what needs to be done.

The second thing is this: you are three years, now, into a five-year term. There have been lots of good ideas, not enough delivery. I would like you to be a significant chapter in the European Union's history over the deplorable common fisheries policy and its reform. So please, stop thinking of yourself as a footnote and get out there and make things happen!

Five years ago, I was at Johannesburg, where the European Union signed up to the principle of securing maximum sustainable yield status by 2015. We were not talking about introducing a policy by 2015; we were talking about getting the fish up to those levels by 2015. It should not have been just a piece – it has to be more than that.

If we are to do that, in eight years, it will probably be already too late. We have got to start having delivery, and, every day until that happens, you have to consider yourself a failure.

Do not listen to Parliament; do not listen to the Ministers who try and block you all the time – just start delivering.

Carl Schlyter, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (SV) Madam President, I can agree with much of what Mr Davies says. Fish are dying! When they die, there will be no income for fisherman. So it is much smarter to invest in the future by having maximum sustainable yields now, rather than a maximum available yield, which has been the Union's policy so far. That is entirely unsustainable!

Then we can discuss scientific gaps in methods and the fact that it is perhaps a blunt instrument. But the EU has low inflation as an overall target for economic policy and that is an extremely blunt instrument, but it has not been criticised in the same way. In such cases this is a much sharper instrument and for that I want to thank the Commissioner. You have realised that the policy is completely wrong, completely unsuccessful, and are now trying to put it right.

Later we will be discussing the problem of discards and a combination of measures may perhaps begin to resolve the problems. But when we talk about socioeconomic assessments, we must have a longer time perspective. That is the thrust of my amendment. Without it, you might as well say, 'Oh well, fishermen today do not want to do anything!' To take away the jobs of the fishermen of all future generations, that is, if anything, a poor socioeconomic assessment.

Pedro Guerreiro, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (PT) As a general comment on the fundamental points contained in the report under discussion, which is of crucial importance for the fisheries sector, we think it is relevant to point out the differences in the long- and short-term application of the principle of sustainability in fisheries. That is, the long-term plans aim to define objectives or themes to achieve a stable situation to be reached after a relatively long period, whereas short-term measures are based on proposals drawn up annually in order to rectify, in a short period of time, the fishing mortality rate until the level proposed as a long-term objective is reached.

As regards the long-term objective for fisheries the principal objective laid down in Johannesburg might be accepted – that of obtaining the maximum sustainable catch of fish stocks. However, it is important to stress that, in order to formulate the maximum sustainable yield objective, it is essential to apply scientific analysis to determine the fishing mortality rate that guarantees the maximum catch which the fisheries resources can provide in a sustainable manner. For that it is essential to take account of the natural characteristics of each fisheries resource, as well as to know the nature and type of fishing methods. To assess the fishing level that is appropriate for the long-term objective, it is necessary to check the forecasts drawn up by scientists, which

implies that these forecasts must be based on reliable information, that they will be adopted by managers and accepted and obeyed by fishermen, always safeguarding, and I want to stress the always, the socio-economic situation of the fisheries sector and of the fishing communities.

In practice, the aim is to estimate the long-term catches and the corresponding fishing mortality rates. For that we need to select a criterion for sustainability and determine the level of fishing that produces the maximum sustainable catch level. This is where the real debate begins.

Different values have been proposed for fishing mortality rates for the long-term management of stocks in the Member States' exclusive economic zones. Various scientists think it is preferable to set $F_{0.1}$ as the fishing mortality rate rather than, for example, FMSY, which they regard as less appropriate. It should be noted that FMSY, which is the fishing mortality rate, should not be confused with MSY, which is the catch level.

Finally, I agree that it is essential for the sustainability measures to be accompanied by an evaluation of the socio-economic consequences and costs entailed in implementing them.

Thomas Wise, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Madam President, it is not often that a member of the UK Independence Party congratulates a rapporteur in this House. In this case I will make a rare exception.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations has estimated that the catch of 70% of fish species on this planet has already reached or exceeded maximum sustainable yield (MSY). The common fisheries policy, with the disgraceful problem of discards that results from it, has made a major contribution to what is potentially a grave ecological disaster, especially in the North Sea.

In the 1980s, the Canadian Government was warned by fishermen that cod was being dangerously overfished. The Government ignored the warnings and, by 1992, the cod fishery totally collapsed. A similar situation now seems to be evolving in European waters.

The rapporteur refers to deficient analysis and inadequate solutions offered by the Commission's communication, which she goes on to describe as simplistic. The Commission has recently been criticised for the way it gathers and interprets statistics on maritime issues. In a recent briefing, the British Government refers to 'an absence of necessary data on what the appropriate targets should be'. The Commission's interpretation of MSY is based on outdated models and dogmatic ecological concepts. It clearly demonstrates the desire to gain further competences at any cost.

The loss of our fishing stocks is too high a price to pay, and I thank the rapporteur for being honest in her condemnation of the Commission's communication. It surely says something when the Europhile PPE-DE Group is echoing the UKIP line. But then, everyone gets there sooner or later!

Jean-Claude Martinez, *on behalf of the ITS Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, the reports by our two colleagues, including the one by Mrs Fraga, relate to this insoluble problem of fisheries – insoluble because fish stocks are limited and demand is constantly increasing. Consequently, the fisheries policy is not the CAP.

Since 1968 and Sicco Mansholt, the Commission has for 40 years been making a strategic mistake with the CAP, which amounts to a crime against humanity: humanity needs cereals and milk and they are in short supply as the increase in prices shows.

With fisheries policy it is different. The Commission's mistakes simply come from its normal, technocratic sin, but not from a strategic crime. Management of fish stocks with TACs, quotas, FIFGs and MAGPs has failed. The Commission has legislated on everything: nets, tonnages, fleet power, number of units and when all is said and done – as the rapporteur tells us – there are fewer fishermen, less cod and even less bluefin tuna in the Mediterranean, hence the fury of fishermen in June and July. Where I come from, for example, in the port of Sète or Le Grau-du-Roi, the fishermen who use thonaille fishing, which is traditional coastal fishing with small nets, were protesting that they could not fish from July onwards.

Nevertheless, despite all these checks, all this destruction, all these sanctions – perhaps one day they will even put electronic tags on fishermen to monitor them – the stocks are in danger, the rapporteur tells us. The Common Fisheries Policy has not worked, and why? Because the problem is worldwide: China, Indonesia, the Philippines and Peru fish. As with wine, where we are pulling up as the rest of the world is planting, we are breaking up our boats as the United States are building more of them and as Russia, Iceland and Norway are increasing the engine size of their vessels.

You can invent indicators, a type of maximum sustainable yield, but if your neighbour is fishing more, you fishing less will not improve stocks. Moreover, because farming, or aquaculture, is not a real solution either because of fishmeal, fisheries is therefore the perfect demonstration that the Community level is both too high when the fishing is coastal and the decision should be local, or too low when the fishing is deep-sea. In these cases, either we will very quickly rise to global level with the help of scientists, or by the end of the twenty-first century, we will be going to the cinema to fish for the last Nemos.

Jim Allister (NI). – Madam President, I welcome and support this report and commend the rapporteur on its production. We have had years of talk about sustainable fisheries, and as many years of bureaucratic controls. Yet stocks in the main are no better, and fishermen are a lot fewer and a lot poorer. It is hard to escape the conclusion that fisheries policy to date has indeed been a hopeless failure.

Fishermen have been saying this for years, but until now the Commission has not been listening – nor, it seems, has Mr Davies, who seems to want more of the same failure. Total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas as the key instrument of control have been a disaster, generating the scandal of discards and, for many fishermen, nothing short of poverty. Yet within the new proffered maximum sustainable yield model, we still have this flawed overlapping of the TAC quota system with the fishing effort system. They must be disentangled. We cannot have both. We all want sustainable fisheries, but that means sustainability for fishermen too. It means discouraging discards. It means simplifying the technical measures, and it means embracing flexibility. Let us get there as quickly as possible.

Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE). – (ES) Madam President, I think that it is very late, we are all very tired and I think a little shocked by this terrible news of the death of three fishermen and the loss of five more in the waters of Cádiz – the boat belonged to the Barbate fleet – and I think that news like this should make us all think, as it demonstrates the difficulties of an occupation which, even today, can carry off eight men at a single stroke.

I think, therefore, Commissioner, that one of the main problems that this Communication raises is that, as it seeks to take action on resources, only restricting fishing activity without placing obligations on the other economic players with activities associated with the marine ecosystem, it loses, and we all lose, political legitimacy, especially as the Commission Directorate responsible for fisheries is also responsible for maritime affairs.

My second concern or question is how the Commission intends to apply MSY from a practical point of view, as all the indications are that it raises problems, serious problems, especially in the case of mixed fisheries in which different species interact and the level of catch that determines the level of effort does not correspond to the MSY of each individual species. Another problem that we also have is with those populations for which we do not have any sort of assessment.

What is certain is that those working in the sector are concerned and they are right when they say that gaps left by the Community fleet in order to respond to MSY, to this political commitment to MSY, will be immediately filled by undertakings from third countries, as the fisheries market is controlled by the need to provide a continuous supply.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE). – Madam President, over the years I have not always agreed with our rapporteur, Ms Fraga Estévez, but much of this report I can agree with. It says the Community system has made controls difficult and encouraged discards. It says it welcomes the Commission's communication recognising that the existing fisheries management policy has failed. It notes that it will be difficult to apply the maximum sustainable yield model to multi-species fisheries, which certainly applies to most that Scots fishermen are involved in. It notes that the model is unsuitable for pelagic species.

I disagree with the words 'eliminated discrimination' and will be asking for a split vote tomorrow to take these out, because I know from past discussions with our rapporteur that this is code for an attack on relative stability which, for as long as we have a common fisheries policy, must remain. But I agree also with the Commissioner's comments earlier when he said that we must start to move in the right direction. After all the years of pain that has been inflicted directly as a result of the common fisheries policy, we should have been rather further forward by now.

Urszula Krupa (IND/DEM). – (PL) Madam President, with just one minute to speak, I have been asked to take the floor on behalf of Polish fishermen, who wish to state that the regulation that has been introduced concerning a ban on cod fishing discriminates against Polish fishermen, especially in view of the widespread knowledge concerning other countries' catches.

The fishermen hope that the wording of the regulation has arisen out of ignorance on the part of the European Commission with regard to the true scale of fishing in the Baltic Sea by individual countries. They demand not only that the regulation be rescinded, but also that a special independent commission be appointed under the auspices of the European Parliament to investigate and explain the principles and method of counting fish numbers in the Baltic Sea following enlargement of the Union in 2004, and to grasp the extent of the irregularities.

Catherine Stihler (PSE). – Madam President, few of us will dispute the importance of having long-term sustainability of commercial fish stocks. The EU signed up to the commitment made by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 to reach maximum sustainable yield (MSY) in fisheries by 2015 at the latest.

It is vital that we open up the debate on how to achieve the goal of reducing fishing pressure on vulnerable species, and this report by Ms Fraga Estévez is an important part of that process.

The merits of fishing at low levels of fishing mortality and building up a more robust spawning stock were also considered in the Net Benefits Report by the UK Prime Minister's strategy unit.

As a Scot I am all too familiar with the pressures on vulnerable fishing stocks such as North Sea cod, and all the more with the practical difficulties of applying management plans in mixed fisheries areas such as off the Scottish coasts. The difficulties do not remove the obligation to act.

I welcome the recognition by the Commission of the need for stakeholder involvement and that regional advisory councils (RACs) are included in the proposed process for taking this forward. Some of the RACs have already begun to consider long-term management and the issue of MSY, and it will be important that the strategy is developed in partnership with stakeholders.

At this stage we should not get too side-tracked by discussing the technicalities of what MSY actually is and how it should be applied. A more important focus is bringing fishing opportunities into better balance with available stocks for a more sustainable future.

Marianne Mikko (PSE). – (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, five years ago, at the sustainable development summit in Johannesburg, we entered into a commitment to conserve fish stocks and restore them rapidly to the level which ensures maximum sustainable yield. The change to the administrative system which is being planned sets considerably more ambitious objectives as compared to the current safe level and the precautionary principle. However, the pros and cons of the change must be weighed up very carefully.

The European Union needs a flexible system to manage fish stocks and the facilities to react quickly. There also needs to be provision in the long-term plans for reasonable yet flexible yearly adjustments. The European Commission assumes that fish stocks are affected primarily by catches, although the weather, predators, foreign species and man-made problems can have major impacts on stocks. The impact of the gas pipeline between Russia and Germany on the environment of the Baltic Sea has not yet been assessed, although construction is already under way.

It is a source of great concern to me that the comb jellyfish has recently been sighted in the Baltic Sea, as the species, which originates in America, led to the near collapse of fish stocks in the Black Sea in the 1980s and it is now wreaking destruction in the Caspian Sea. In one year it has spread from the coast of Sweden to the heart of the Baltic Sea. We must not twiddle our thumbs until the fish stocks in the Baltic Sea have been destroyed as well.

The effects of the new administrative system therefore need to be explored primarily at regional rather than European level, because every Member State's fishing fleet has its own distinctive features. It is extremely important to involve regional advisory bodies if we are to implement a forward-looking fisheries policy. The change to the administrative system requires a reduction in fishing fleet numbers and in their loads and therefore means large losses for our fisheries undertakings. The European Fisheries Fund plainly does not have sufficient means to deal with such large losses.

(The President cut the speaker off)

Joe Borg, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, first of all let me refer to the accident that Ms Fraga Estévez and Ms Miguélez Ramos mentioned. I share their concern and sorrow at the loss of life and hope that the missing fishermen can be brought to safety.

Allow me to pick up on some of the points that were raised in the debate, which have proved to be quite varied to say the least – poles apart on how to move forward. However, having said that, from the debate it is clear that we share a common view that fisheries have to be brought to sustainable levels as soon as possible. This does not mean that what we are proposing is drastic and immediate action. Rather we are setting ourselves an objective to arrive at maximum sustainable yield (MSY) in a gradual and flexible manner. At each step we will re-evaluate and re-assess the targets we set and if required, we will adapt them to changing situations.

In other words, the MSY approach is providing us with a direction and not necessarily with a fixed target. Let me repeat, the MSY approach moves fisheries management in the right direction, away from over-exploitation and towards conditions of higher and more stable catches and lower costs.

This approach should be adaptive so that as we learn more – or, as environmental and ecosystem conditions change – new knowledge can be applied to the approach.

The point has been raised that MSY has not worked and is not appropriate for pelagic stocks, and that it is an outdated concept. Let me say there have been fisheries management strategies in Europe and in other parts of the world which were successful. Although the concept is not new, it does not mean that it is outdated. The important point is that, as long as it defines a path for fisheries management and is flexible enough to allow for regular revisions, it has good chances of success.

Good examples of some success can be seen in stocks such as saithe, North Sea haddock and mackerel, which are fished close to MSY level and which are generally stable and profitable.

Let me highlight one point. The purpose of this proposal is not to penalise fishermen, who, admittedly, have to make a number of adjustments, but rather it seeks to reach an objective and embark on a direction where the sector operates in a more stable and in a more profitable environment. As I stated in my opening statement, the European Fisheries Fund allows Member States to develop measures concerning adjustments of capacity and fishing effort in the context of long-term plans, including social and economic provisions involving the appropriate use of public money, in their operational programmes.

Another point raised relates to the fact that MSY will not work in mixed fisheries, because when targeting one stock to move towards MSY one could end up in a situation where the other stocks caught in such a mixed fishery are under-exploited. I think we have to be realistic about the situation and the majority of mixed fisheries. The stocks concerned are equally exploited to unsustainable levels. It is clear that the application of the MSY approach to mixed fisheries will be difficult and will have to be studied on a case-by-case basis. However, the mixed fisheries problem exists and, if we do not address it, there can be no improvements and no steps can be taken in the right direction.

Regarding consultation, let me say that the Commission is committed to stakeholder involvement and consultation. Many consultations have already been held since the adoption of the objective of MSY at the Johannesburg Summit. Such consultations involved Member States, scientists and the regional advisory councils, who are studying our proposal as well and who are seeking to advise us on the best way forward. Discussions on the plans will be held at a later stage, after we have developed impact assessments, consulted the industry and drawn up our specific proposals. I look forward to a continued dialogue with you on these plans.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday 6 September 2007.

16. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

17. Closure of sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.25 p.m.)