

WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 9 a.m.)

2. Statements by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to make a statement on the occasion of the fifth European Day for the Victims of Terrorism. It is a day which must remain in our memory and a day on which we commemorate all the innocent victims of terrorism. This weekend, two soldiers in the county of Antrim in Northern Ireland were murdered by the Real IRA and on Monday, a policeman was shot in the county of Armagh. The policeman who was killed was married and had children. This barbaric act of terrorism has once again torn a family apart and brought with it unimaginable suffering. Yesterday, at least ten people died in a suicide bomb attack in southern Sri Lanka and more than twenty were seriously injured.

On behalf of the European Parliament, I would like to express my outrage at these abhorrent attacks on innocent people and send my deepest condolences to the families of the victims. They will forever remain in our memories.

Today, we in the European Parliament would like to speak out loudly and clearly against the indiscriminate violence of terrorism. We condemn utterly the senseless destruction of human life, the deaths of entire families as a result of blind fanaticism, which causes people to kill their fellow human beings and to trample human dignity underfoot. Terrorism is a direct attack on freedom, human rights and democracy. Terrorism is an attempt to destroy by means of indiscriminate violence the values which unite us in the European Union and within our Member States.

These acts of terrorism shock us all. They cause us deep and heartrending pain, but they cannot and will not destroy the foundations of the democratic society which is based on our shared values.

Terrorism is a crime which deserves no leniency. Terrorism represents one of the greatest dangers to the security, stability and democratic values of the international community. It is a direct attack on our citizens, on all of us. The European Parliament plays an active role in combating terrorism and in supporting the victims of terrorist attacks. We cannot repeat often enough that there is no justification for terrorism. For this reason, we must continue to work together to fight terrorism by applying the principles of the rule of law and using all the force of the law. Today in the European Parliament, all our thoughts are with the victims of terrorism, wherever in the world they died. We would like to express our solidarity with them. I would like to ask you to remember in silence the victims of the Real IRA and of the suicide bomb attack in Sri Lanka.

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

Ladies and gentlemen, the great European, Jean Monnet, one of the founding fathers of European integration, died thirty years ago on 16 March 1979. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of his death, I would like briefly to honour and recognise his legacy and his life's work in the cause of European integration at the start of this plenary sitting of the European Parliament.

Today we remember the priceless legacy of a man, who, together with Robert Schuman, one of the architects of the reconciliation between Germany and France, took the first step towards establishing a community with a common destiny based on peace, understanding, democracy and cooperation among the people of Europe. Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the principles highlighted by Jean Monnet and the methods he used to implement them have lost none of their relevance. On the contrary, their importance is obvious to us all. The major challenges presented by globalisation, the economic and financial crisis and global warming will cause Europeans to work even more closely together to provide an effective defence for our shared values and our interests in the world. Jean Monnet would, of course, welcome the progress made in

the Treaty of Lisbon towards a democratic European Union which is capable of action and of facing the challenges of the 21st century.

And finally, it is important to mention that it was the Action Committee for a United States of Europe established by Jean Monnet which, among other things, proposed direct elections to the European Parliament. In the last thirty years since the death of Jean Monnet, this dream has become an impressive reality with the creation of the parliamentary dimension of the European Union. We are all the heirs of this great European, Jean Monnet, and his work continues to have a lasting impact. It has resulted in fundamental changes to the relationships between the European states and still influences the lives of all of our citizens today.

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Jean Monnet's death, I would like us to think about the task ahead of us and our obligations for the future, which are to commit to continuing the great work started by Jean Monnet of unifying our continent.

José Manuel Barroso, *President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, 'Between different countries, each one's advantage is limited to the results of its own efforts, to the gains obtained in relation to its neighbour, and to the difficulties it manages to transfer to it. In our Community, the advantage of each of the member countries is the effect of the prosperity of the whole.' This is what Jean Monnet said in 1954. The words have lost none of their relevance, rather the contrary.

This March, as Mr Pöttering has just said, marks the thirtieth anniversary of his death, in 1979. This is why I wish to pay tribute to this founding father of the Europe that we all love, this great European whose heritage can only inspire us in these times of crisis.

Recently, and also to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the European Commission, we decided to dedicate the College room – the main room at the Commission – to the memory of Jean Monnet in a very simple, but very meaningful ceremony, at which I had the pleasure and the honour to have at my side not only the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, but also the President-in-Office of the European Council, Nicolas Sarkozy.

This tells you that we at the Commission are proud of Jean Monnet's immense heritage. As the first president of the European Coal and Steel Community, he was, in fact, the first president of the institution at the origin of our institution, the European Commission, which is doing its best to keep alive his ideals, which are the ideals of all Europeans who love peace, democracy and solidarity.

(Applause)

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – (PT) I, too, wish to pay tribute to Jean Monnet, but I asked for the floor in order to congratulate the President on his statement on the European Day in Memory of the Victims of Terrorism. It was at my suggestion five years ago that we adopted this position, which the Council approved in a meeting on 25 March, following the tragic attacks in Madrid. However, my speech is an appeal. Parliament has always faithfully celebrated this date, but unfortunately this date has not yet achieved the scope that it should have within the European institutions and Member States. I believe that the celebration of this date is one of our most important ways of paying tribute to the victims, as the President has done, but also of raising the level of public awareness. I know that there are some celebrations in Madrid today, but little else.

I therefore call on the Commission and the Czech Presidency to ensure that all Member States appropriately celebrate this date in future.

3. Preparation of the European Council (19-20 March 2008) - European Economic Recovery Plan - Guidelines for the Member States' employment policies - Cohesion Policy: investing in the real economy (debate)

President. – The next item is the Joint Debate on the Council and Commission statements: Preparation for the European Council (19 and 20 March 2009),

- the report (A6-0063/2009) by Mrs E. Ferreira, on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, on a European Economic Recovery Plan (2008/2334(INI)),

- the report (A6-0052/2009) by Mr J. Andersson, on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on the proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (COM(2008)0869 - C6-0050/2009 - 2008/0252(CNS)),

- the report (A6-0075/2009) by Mr E. Kirilov, on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development, on Cohesion Policy: Investing in the real economy (2009/2009(INI)).

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, let me first join you in paying tribute to Jean Monnet. We are in a time of crisis, and I think this is exactly the time when we need a strong institution, and it is a great opportunity to raise the importance of Jean Monnet as one of the founding fathers of European integration.

However, the purpose of today's meeting is to discuss the upcoming European Council. This Council, as we all know, comes at a critical time for the Union. We face very significant challenges as a result of unprecedented stresses on our financial systems and our economies as well.

This issue, together with energy security, climate change and the financing of the mitigation and adaptation to climate change, will be the focus of next week's meeting.

As this Parliament certainly knows, a wide range of measures have been taken by the Union and the Member States in the face of the financial crisis. We have avoided a meltdown of the financial system.

Our top priority now is the restoration of credit flows to the economy. We have to deal, in particular, with the 'impaired assets' held by banks, since these discourage them from resuming lending. At their meeting on 1 March, the Heads of State and Government agreed that we should do this in a coordinated manner, in line with the guidelines provided by the Commission.

We also need to do more to improve the regulation and supervision of financial institutions. This is a clear lesson from the crisis, and prevention is no less important. Cross-border banks hold up to 80% of Europe's banking assets. Two thirds of European banks' assets are held in only 44 multinational groups. Strengthening supervision is, therefore, important in itself. It will help prevent future crises, but it will also send a message of confidence to consumers and markets.

Important work is under way in that respect. The Presidency is fully committed to working closely with the European Parliament with a view to the rapid adoption of the Solvency II Directive (on insurance), the revised Credit Requirements Directive (on banks) and the UCITS Directive (on undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities). We are also working to get rapid adoption of the regulations on the protection of bank deposits and on credit-rating agencies.

However, we probably need to go further. The High Level Group, chaired by Mr de Larosière, has produced, as you know, very interesting recommendations, and the Commission's communication of 4 March also paves the way for significant reform in this area. So the European Council must send a clear message that this is a priority and that decisions need to be taken as early as June.

As you are well aware, Member States' budget deficits are growing fast right now. Of course, deficits inevitably swell in times of economic recession. Automatic stabilisers can, to some extent, play a positive role. The Stability and Growth Pact was revised in 2005 precisely for that reason, to allow for sufficient flexibility in difficult times. But this flexibility needs to be used judiciously, taking into account different starting points. Restoring confidence also requires governments to give a clear commitment to sound public finances, fully respecting the Stability and Growth Pact. Some Member States have already made efforts towards consolidation. Most will do so from 2010. This will also be an important message from next week's meeting.

The financial crisis is now affecting the real economy. Member States have launched significant recovery programmes, which are now well under way. The overall stimulus this offers represents, as was agreed, 1.5% of GDP, but, if you include its automatic stabilisers, it comes to 3.3% of the EU's GDP. Of course, Member States' responses are different. They face different situations and have different margins for manoeuvre, but they are coordinated and are based on common principles defined in the European Recovery Programme, which was agreed last December. This is important if we are to ensure synergies and avoid negative spill-over effects.

Specific and targeted action has been elaborated on in a synergic way between the Commission and the Member States and the Presidency. That enabled us to both keep the level playing field and, at the same time,

face in a concerted and efficient manner the aggravations in some of Europe's key industrial sectors, such as the automotive industry.

The European Council will assess the state of implementation of this programme. Here, too, the Commission's communication of 4 March sets out a number of important principles which should guide the action of Member States. They include the need to maintain openness within the internal market, ensuring non-discrimination and working towards long-term policy goals, such as facilitating structural change, enhancing competitiveness and building a low-carbon economy.

As far as the Community part of the Recovery Programme is concerned, the Presidency is working very hard to reach an agreement in the European Council on the Commission proposal to finance energy and rural development projects. As you know, there have been discussions within the Council over the precise list of projects to be supported by the Community and how they should be funded.

Given the important role of Parliament, as one of the branches of the budgetary authority and as co-legislator in this matter, the Presidency is committed to close cooperation with you over the coming weeks, with a view to reaching an agreement as soon as possible.

In addition to the short-term measures, long-term efforts are needed if we are to ensure the competitiveness of our economies. Structural reforms are more urgent than ever if we are to promote growth and jobs. Therefore, the renewed Lisbon Strategy remains the right framework within which to promote sustainable economic growth, which will, in turn, lead to the creation of new jobs.

At the moment, our citizens are particularly worried about the effect of the economic situation on levels of unemployment. Next week's European Council should agree on concrete orientations on how the EU can contribute to mitigating the social impact of the crisis. This issue will also be the focus of the special summit which will take place in early May.

Let me be clear on one point: we will not protect jobs by creating barriers to foreign competition. At their meeting 10 days ago, the Heads of State and Government were clear that we have to make the maximum possible use of the single market as the engine for recovery. Protectionism is clearly not the right answer to face this crisis – quite the opposite. More than ever, our companies need open markets, both internally within the Union, but also at the global level.

Which leads me to the G20 Summit meeting in London. The European Council will establish the Union's position in advance of the G20 Summit. We want this summit to be ambitious. We cannot afford it to fail.

Leaders will be looking at prospects for growth and employment and at reform of the global financial system and of the international financial institutions. They will also be looking at the particular challenges facing developing countries. The EU is active in all these areas and should be in a strong position to ensure that the international community takes the right decisions.

The other major item on the agenda of next week's European Council will be energy security. The recent energy crisis demonstrated all too clearly the extent to which we need to increase our ability to resist future supply problems, as we could see earlier this year.

The Commission has provided some very useful elements in its Second Strategic Energy Review. On the basis of this review, the Presidency intends that the European Council agree on a set of concrete orientations aimed at enhancing the Union's energy security in the short, medium and long term.

In the short term, this means having available concrete measures which can be called on if we are suddenly faced with a new disruption of gas supplies. It also means taking urgent steps to launch infrastructure projects to enhance energy interconnections – this is certainly essential.

In the medium term, it means adapting our legislation on oil and gas stocks to ensure that Member States act with responsibility and solidarity. It means taking adequate measures to improve energy efficiency.

In the long term, it means diversifying our sources, suppliers and routes of supply. We have to work with our international partners to promote the Union's energy interests. We must create a fully fledged internal market for electricity and gas. As you know, this is legislation which the Presidency very much hopes can be completed before the European elections.

Next week's meeting will also discuss the preparations for the Copenhagen Conference on Climate Change. We remain committed to a global, comprehensive agreement in Copenhagen next December. The

Commission's January communication is a very helpful basis. It is very clear that climate change is a challenge which can only be tackled through a concerted global effort.

Finally, the European Council will also launch the Eastern Partnership. This important initiative will help to promote stability and prosperity on the whole continent. It will also contribute to accelerating reforms and to deepening our commitment to work together with those countries.

The partnership includes a bilateral dimension which is adapted to each partner country. It foresees the negotiation of association agreements, which might include deep and comprehensive free trade areas.

The multilateral track will provide a framework in which common challenges can be addressed. There will be four policy platforms: democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration; energy security; and, last but not least, contacts between people.

You will appreciate from this presentation that next week's European Council has many substantial issues to address. We are facing many serious challenges, not least the current economic crisis. The Czech Presidency, through the leadership of Prime Minister Topolánek, intends to ensure that the meeting next week demonstrates through practical action that the European Union remains committed to its ideals and that it faces these challenges together in a coordinated manner and in a spirit of responsibility and of solidarity.

(Applause)

José Manuel Barroso, *President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Vondra, honourable Members, we are living through testing times.

An economic crisis of this magnitude makes its effects felt on families, on workers, on all categories of the population and on companies, in the four corners of Europe. It destroys jobs and tests the resistance of our social models. It also puts strong political pressure on all the leaders.

The European Union is not immune from such tensions. This is why it has decided to bring into play all the levers at its disposal to get to grips with the crisis and its consequences, by using what gives it its force: European institutions and Member States working together in a community based on the rule of law to provide collective solutions to common problems.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have already done much in these last six months to fight the crisis that we are experiencing. We avoided a collapse of the financial system in the autumn; we contributed to the launch of an international process with the G20; we were among the first to focus on the real economy by agreeing a recovery plan in December, a plan whose number one recommendation – a budgetary stimulus never seen before at European level – is beginning to be implemented. This support for the real economy amounts to a total of 3.3% of GDP and includes a real contribution from the European budget.

The recovery plan includes, for example, accelerated advances from the structural funds for an envelope of EUR 6.3 billion in 2009, in addition to the EUR 5 billion already committed.

The actions carried out in the last six months are fully in line with the Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment. Structural reforms, which have been of great help in strengthening our economies, must be pursued because they also help to maintain short-term demand, but we must now move on to the next stage and deploy the measures for combating the crisis more thoroughly.

We need greater coordination and wider-ranging effects. Now is the time to move up a gear in our response to the crisis. We must understand that this is a new type of crisis and that we never envisaged a crisis of such dimensions, of such magnitude, of such depth.

This will be the mission for the European Council next week. With the very strong support of the Czech Presidency, whose commitment and complete cooperation with the Commission I welcome, I am convinced there will be progress in four areas that the Commission defined a few days ago in its communication, namely, the financial markets, the real economy, employment and the social dimension, and the global dimension via the G20.

The informal summit of 1 March – thanks to a very large extent to the effective chairmanship of Prime Minister Topolánek – has already laid the foundations for a fruitful European Council. I am proud to note that the Commission's preparatory work has met with such a favourable reception. Our guidelines on impaired assets, our communication on the automotive sector and the report that I have entrusted to

Jacques de Larosière and his high-level group have enabled the Member States to build a consensus so that they can rally round common positions.

I welcome the broad support that is coalescing around these courses of action in the European Parliament. I would mention, by way of example, the reports we will debate this morning, the Ferreira report on the economic recovery plan, the Andersson report on the guidelines for employment, and the Kirilov report on cohesion policy.

These reports and the resolutions on which your Assembly will vote this week, in particular, those from the Lisbon Strategy coordination group, will make what I consider to be an essential contribution to the European Council. On the eve of the London Summit, they can only strengthen Europe's position on the international stage, and I welcome that.

Mr President, I would like briefly to pick out three themes which I believe must guide this European Council's work: stabilising financial markets, revitalising the real economy and helping people make it through the crisis.

Look at the financial system. Yes, we need immediate action to address immediate problems. After our initiatives on recapitalisation and guarantees, our guidance on impaired assets targets the major obstacle now identified as blocking the flow of credit. I believe, and it is in our communication, that without cleaning the banking system, we will not see the restoration of credit flow to the real economy.

But, as has often been argued in this Chamber, we also need to rebuild confidence through a major overhaul of our regulatory regime. That is why we have set out a detailed calendar of new regulatory proposals. Next month, the Commission will come forward with new proposals on hedge funds, on private equity and on executive pay.

However, we must also revamp supervision. As you will have seen from the communication the Commission adopted last Wednesday, and which I had an opportunity to discuss with your Conference of Presidents the following day, the Commission is keen to accelerate implementation of the de Larosière report. We will present the overall architecture at the end of May for endorsement by the European Council in June, and we will come with legislative proposals in the autumn.

In more general terms, beyond financial systems, using short-term action to target our long-term goals will pay double dividends. It will make us stronger when the upturn comes, ready to face the challenge of competitiveness and a low-carbon economy.

Just look at energy security. The fact that we are in an economic crisis does not make our problems of dependency disappear. On the contrary, and I welcome the decision of Prime Minister Topolánek to have a discussion on this issue. This is central to what we are doing. Investing in infrastructure brings a stimulus today, and it is badly needed for the European economy, but it also makes us stronger and more competitive tomorrow. That is why your support, the European Parliament's support for the EUR 5 billion stimulus to energy and broadband projects is so valuable – the more so as I am rather concerned, to be honest with you, about the state of play in Council, where we are not making the progress I would wish to see.

Of course, we all know that the Community budget, at less than 1% of GDP, can only make a limited contribution to a European-wide stimulus. The money has to come, essentially, from national budgets. However, we need to deploy all national levers in the European perspective in order to be effective. The single market is the best possible platform for recovery. In 2006 alone, Europe was richer by EUR 240 billion, or the equivalent of EUR 518 for every European citizen because of the single market.

The European Council should cement its place at the heart of our recovery strategy by agreeing principles that should shape the European recovery, including a shared commitment to openness and a level playing field internally and externally, thereby clearly rejecting protectionism but, of course, protecting the single market, the bedrock of European prosperity.

Most importantly, though, we must acknowledge that this is not a question of economic theory or dry statistics. This crisis is having a major impact on people, namely the most vulnerable across Europe – now, today. That is why my number one concern – by far the most important test we face – is the social impact of this crisis, namely the problem of rising unemployment.

We have to focus our energy on employment and on helping people make it through the crisis. This requires determination and imagination. We need to help companies to keep workers on their books, to use training

imaginatively to serve long- and short-term needs, and we need to bring help to those already unemployed. We need to be sure that we make the most of national actions to help the most vulnerable but we also need to make the most of the European instruments we have, from the Social Fund to the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund.

Launching a process now which takes us up to the Employment Summit in May gives us two months of intensive efforts to put plans in place and, if possible, to develop new and more ambitious strategies to tackle the unemployment problem. We need to use this time well.

Though time is short, I believe we should try to organise a much more inclusive process in the run-up, involving social partners, civil society and parliamentarians. It is particularly important that we take advantage of your privileged insight into what is really happening on the ground. If we follow this approach of pooling our resources and coordinating action at all levels – at European level, at national level, at regional level, at social partners' level – we will emerge from the crisis quicker and, I believe, stronger.

We will also carry more weight on the global stage. It is no coincidence that the proposals we have made for the European Union's G20 position have a strong echo of our approach within Europe. They are based around the same principles. With a unified European Union voice in the G20, they will carry a lot of weight and the European Union will be – if the Member States are ready to really work together – in a very good position to shape the global response to this crisis.

Europe today has to find its strength in cohesion, in coordination, in real practical solidarity. For that, we must all work closely together and stay in close touch as the task of recovery unfolds, including, of course, with this Parliament.

I look forward to making this a reality as we all work for recovery in the coming weeks and months.

Elisa Ferreira, *rapporteur*. – (PT) Mr President, Commission President, ladies and gentlemen, the current crisis is the worst that the European Union has ever known. Unfortunately, it is far from over. Bankruptcies are still occurring and unemployment is continuing to rise. Never before has the European project been subject to such a tough test. Not only will the robustness of the recovery be dependent on our joint response, but also, in all likelihood, the very continuation of the European project, at least in terms of the speed of our development and expansion.

We did not create the European Union to be limited, in times of prosperity, to a huge market nor to return, in times of crisis, to the national selfishness of 'every man for himself'. The European project is a political project, and a guarantor of peace, freedom and democracy. However, in economic terms, it is based both on competition and on solidarity and cohesion. In fact, it thrives on the ability to offer quality and opportunities for progression to all citizens, whatever their origin.

Today, in this crisis, people are looking to Europe for protection and action to help them quickly get through the current critical phase, without any serious social breakdowns. They are looking to Europe to help them rediscover their future and to boost employment and business, based around new and more sustainable approaches to development.

The Lisbon Agenda and the environmental commitments are inspirational intentions, but we need to urgently give them substance and force. In this respect, Parliament's call to the Council and the Commission is clear, firm and loud. The consensus achieved in the vote in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs shows this common intention. I hope that the vote in this House today will be further proof of that.

The various rapporteurs and the various political groups have worked together, and I hope that this message will be conveyed to and perceived by the Commission in this sense.

In this context, I should like to thank the shadow rapporteurs, particularly Mr Hökmark and Mrs in 't Veld. I hope that, with this same determination, today's vote will allow us to confirm and convey this message.

As for the causes of this crisis, the most important point today is to learn the lessons. The Larosière report is, in fact, a very important guide that we must follow. It forms an excellent working basis and encompasses much of what we have already proposed in this House. Its conclusions must, however, lead to immediate and planned action by the Commission. It is also vital that the European Union adopts a determined stance in this respect at the next G20 meeting.

In this context, I believe that there are elements which are symbolic, and I hope that Parliament will today unequivocally vote to fight the offshore system and tax havens. It is not enough, however, just to correct the

errors of the past, particularly with regard to financial regulation and supervision. The damage has now been done and we need a recovery plan that is in line with the EU's responsibilities. We welcome the Commission's rapid initiative, but we are aware, and must be clear, that the means and tools for action are clearly inadequate.

Parliament is giving the Commission a vote of support as regards the flexibility, forward-thinking and swiftness of the available instruments, but we cannot forget that 85% of the funds currently available are in the hands of the various countries making up the European Union. Yet the EU countries have never been so different from one another as they are today. Some countries have the power and instruments to act, while others are completely vulnerable and their toolbox is totally empty. There are countries without any national room for manoeuvre, which are unable to resist the simultaneous and violent forces of the internal market, single currency and globalisation. Among these are the new countries which have just joined the European project and which are among those suffering the most.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that at this point in time, the message from Parliament can be broken down into a series of very clear and very precise messages, but with one common idea, which is: that we need people, jobs and national resources, but also European resources, in order to restore, as the people expect, dynamism, growth and solidarity in the European space.

Jan Andersson, rapporteur. – (SV) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, there has been some discussion as to whether or not the Employment Guidelines need to be amended. It is not a particularly important discussion, as the Employment Guidelines contain every opportunity for action. The problem at the moment is the lack of ability to act. We have been, and are currently, in a financial crisis that has turned into an economic crisis. Now the employment crisis is coming crashing in, with the prospect of social problems further down the road.

It is good that an employment summit has been organised in May, but we must not isolate employment issues from the economic issues. They must, therefore, be integrated into the discussion. I think that we have done too little, too late. One and a half percent of Member States' GDP – that was right when we said it, but now the crisis is even worse than we thought at that time. We need to do more, to make more coordinated efforts – certainly more than two percent – in order to deal with it. The risk of not doing enough or of doing it too late is much, much greater than the risk of doing too much, as it will result in increased unemployment and in reduced tax revenue, which will affect the social problems experienced in the Member States.

What should we do, then? We know very well what. We should tie together what is good in the short term with regard to combating unemployment with what is needed in the long term. It is about environmental investments, new infrastructure projects, energy efficiency in homes, and it is about education, education, education.

We have talked about lifelong learning. We have never done enough, but now we have the chance to invest seriously in education. We also need to stimulate demand, and for this we need to turn to those groups that will use the funds for consumption: the unemployed, families with children, pensioners and others who will use an increased amount as consumers.

We must do what we can at EU level and try to deal with the Social Fund and the Globalisation Fund quickly so that the resources get out to the Member States. However, if we are to be totally honest, we know that the major economic resources are in the Member States and if the Member States do not do enough, and in a sufficiently coordinated way, we will not succeed. If we look around and summarise what the Member States have done, there is only one Member State that has achieved 1.5%, and that is Germany, which was not initially the country on the front line when it came to taking action. Other countries, the Nordic countries, for example, where I come from, are doing very little, despite the fact that their economic situation is good.

Now we come to the social consequences. You have mentioned them and they are particularly important. They affect not only the social security systems, but also the public sector. The public sector is doubly important. It is about providing people with childcare, care for the elderly and social security, but it is also important for employment. There are huge numbers of people in the public sector and we must ensure that it has sufficient economic resources.

I would also like to say something about young people. Young people are currently becoming unemployed straight from education. We must create opportunities for young people to find employment or further education or whatever it may be. Otherwise, we are storing up problems for the future. In conclusion, we must act. We must act in a coordinated way with solidarity, we must act now and not wait, and our action must be sufficient.

(Applause)

Evgeni Kirilov, *rapporteur*. – (BG) Thank you, Mr President, Mr Vondra and Mr Barroso. It took very little time to draft this report entitled 'Cohesion Policy: Investing in the real economy'. Regardless of this fact, we produced a document which was agreed on and unanimously supported. This fine result would not have been possible without the involvement and assistance of my colleagues on the Committee, the shadow rapporteurs and the cooperation between the political groups, for which I would like to thank everyone.

I would like to dwell on the basic messages conveyed in this report. First of all, this report supports in every case the measures proposed by the European Commission for accelerating and simplifying the implementation of the Structural Funds, which include increasing the advance payments, introducing more flexible schemes for settling expenses etc. We actually require these measures now just when we need to have an adequate response to the economic crisis: investment in the real economy, the preservation and creation of jobs and the encouragement of entrepreneurship. However, these measures are not the only indication of the need for us to act more effectively and efficiently. The proposals on simplifying the rules have been long sought after and expected by users of EU funds and come in response to the recommendations from us and from the European Court of Auditors.

Secondly, the Cohesion Policy and solidarity policy. We not only require in this case a declaration of solidarity but also to see solidarity in action. In a context where European economies are mutually dependent, the adverse effects of the crisis affect every economy. To counter these effects, we must achieve positive results which will generate extensive benefits and be used to meet the goals that have been set for growth and development in the Lisbon Strategy. It is also important for EU citizens' social standards to be preserved, for us to protect the socially deprived, as well as for competition not to be distorted and the environment to continue to be protected. In this respect, solidarity and cohesion are required to the maximum extent so that we succeed in finding together a way out of the crisis more quickly.

Thirdly, it is important for us to learn the lessons from the current crisis and that the measures which will be adopted are not treated as isolated cases. The analysis of the mistakes made and experience gained must continue. In addition, the process of simplifying the procedures must continue. The rules must be made clearer, information more accessible, the administrative burden lighter and procedures more transparent. This is the only way in which mistakes will be reduced and the opportunities for any infringement and corruption limited.

Finally, I would like to call on the Council to adopt as soon as possible the measures proposed for accelerating and simplifying the use of the Structural Funds. I also appeal to the members of the European Commission whom we expect to monitor the impact of the new measures and make new suggestions, as well as the process as a whole. Last but not least, I want to emphasise the fundamental role played by Member States on which depends the action to be taken and the achievement of real results from the implementation of the Cohesion Policy. I will end by mentioning again that we need to see solidarity in action.

Salvador Garriga Polledo, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Budgets*. – (ES) Mr President, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets I would like to state, first and foremost, that this economic recovery plan is much more intergovernmental than Community in nature, and that it demonstrates the real financial limitations of the European Union.

From the Community viewpoint, we are going to use EUR 30 000 million which will be, in practice, mobilised by the European Investment Bank, and in respect of the EUR 5 000 million which belongs, strictly speaking, to the Community budget, we are encountering major problems.

There are no new resources; what is happening is a redistribution of existing resources. With regard to the European Investment Bank, we are fully in agreement with having recourse to it, but we should say that we are worried we are entrusting it with many commitments without having a guarantee that they can be taken forward.

Finally, we regret the Council's inability to reach an agreement on the EUR 5 000 million for energy interconnections and rural broadband.

We believe that the unused margins should not be used. What the European Commission and the Council must do is to turn to the resources given to them by the interinstitutional agreement itself.

Elisabeth Morin, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Barroso, it is the unanimous opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs that I should

like to share with you this morning, for we are looking to see a real promotion of social cohesion in this recovery plan. Social cohesion means being integrated into the labour market. To begin with, then, we want to keep all employees in their jobs and get the unemployed back to work by, among other things, directing the Globalisation Adjustment Fund towards new training courses, so that the workforce is prepared for when we emerge from the crisis.

Therefore, in the short term, we need to keep people in work. In the medium term, we need to provide better training for employees for when the crisis ends and, in the long term, we need to innovate, including in social organisations via employer groups.

Europe is obliged to innovate if it is to survive globalisation.

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, next week's European Council must not be a summit like any other. It must not be a routine summit. Europeans are expecting concrete signals from it, as is my parliamentary group.

This summit must be the one that affirms Europe's strength and determination in the face of the crisis. This strength has been shown in the past when Europe adopted the rules of the social market economy, which limits the damage done by an unprecedented crisis that is hitting every region in the world at the same time. This strength was also proven 10 years ago when Europe armed itself with a currency, the euro, which is undergoing its first major test but is holding its own.

However, a strong Europe must not be a protectionist Europe. A Europe which protects by dint of its rules must not be a fortress Europe, as turning in on ourselves will not bring us out of the crisis. Rather, we must rely on openness and on the affirmation of our identity. Europe's strength in a storm, even more than in calm times, lies in its taking action on behalf of our fellow citizens, including the most underprivileged, and, above all, in doing so as one.

Together with the Commission, and with Mr Barroso, whose series of measures inspired by the de Larosière report I welcome, Europe is fighting to save the banking system.

It is fighting and we are fighting with it not, as some would have us believe, to save the jobs of the traders, but to avoid a general collapse of our entire economy and because there can be no lasting recovery without a healthy banking system.

Europe is fighting to good effect, and I welcome the agreement reached yesterday on reduced VAT rates for the catering and construction sectors, on the introduction of real supervision of the financial markets, on saving jobs, on maintaining or restoring confidence and on ensuring a future for Europeans.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have spoken of strength, I have spoken of unity, I have spoken of effectiveness, but the *raison d'être*, the motivation for all this is solidarity. This is the Europe of Jean Monnet and of all the founding fathers. What use would it have been to have created Europe in the aftermath of the last war if it were only to be renounced in favour of the 'every man for himself' approach 60 years later, with the arrival of the most severe economic crisis since 1929?

Our fellow citizens sometimes ask what the purpose of Europe is. It is up to us to prove that Europe is standing by its 500 million fellow citizens, many of whom are suffering in this crisis, and is also showing solidarity towards the countries of the Union – I am thinking of Ireland, Hungary and others that are experiencing particular difficulties.

I ask, on behalf of my group, that each Head of State or Government in the Twenty Seven reject the lure of isolation which – I choose my words with care – would be suicidal for all our countries.

I ask Mr Vondra, Mr Barroso, and you too, Mr Pöttering, to intervene in the European Council on behalf of our Parliament, to opt for solidarity and innovation. Yes, I do say innovation because I am convinced that we will emerge from the crisis only if we use new resources and make massive investment in the knowledge-based economy, and in research and development.

We must exploit the immense potential the European Union has in the area of new green technologies as soon as possible, since these green innovations must be included in all European policies. This would give a real industrial boost to the economic recovery.

In the same way, the regulatory obstacles to the internal market that still hinder the development of these technologies must be removed as quickly as possible. A real internal market for renewable energies with

clear rules must be introduced since, in a crisis, nothing will remain the same, and we must prepare for the new situation. This is the meaning of the Lisbon and, now, post-Lisbon Strategy.

My parliamentary group, like the centre-right in Europe, is a responsible political organisation. We are for an economy which has rules, we are for a social market economy. This prevents us from engaging in demagoguery and populism. This obliges us to speak honestly to the people of Europe. I hope that the next European Council will take inspiration from this approach.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, with all respect to you, Mr Vondra, it is unacceptable that, in a situation like the current one, the President-in-Office of the Council is not present. This also indicates the nature of his attitude to the current situation.

(Applause)

We have heard many of the old familiar phrases being repeated. We have been listening to this sort of thing for months and we could use the phrases to produce templates. Mr Daul, I would like to congratulate you on your wonderful speech! If you go on making speeches like this, the people in Lipsheim and Pfettisheim will begin to think that you have joined the French Communist Party. It is really wonderful and it all sounds excellent. However, now we actually need to deliver something. We must make the necessary decisions. More must be done in the European Council. The crisis is deepening and jobs are being lost. We have seen EUR 40 billion wiped off the value of shares in the last six months. This means that people's livelihoods are being destroyed. This means that jobs are being lost. This means that companies are being threatened with closure. This means that national economies are being threatened with collapse. Then the Council comes up with nice little resolutions, such as the fiscal stimulus of 1.5% of GDP this year or next year. Three Member States have implemented the resolution so far, which means that 24 states have not. Great Britain, Germany and Spain have done this, and incidentally, all three were pressured by social democrats and socialists, and the other Member States have not. You must do more! You must tell the absent President-in-Office of the Council this.

Mr Barroso, you have made a wonderful speech. It was excellent and we support it fully. Solidarity between the Member States is urgently needed. For us as social democrats and socialists, solidarity is the central concept in this situation. Solidarity between people in society, but also solidarity between states. Solidarity within the eurozone and solidarity between the eurozone and the states outside it. It is important for the Commission to urge the Member States to show solidarity.

It is also important for the Commission to provide us with the draft directives we need to control private equity and hedge funds, to ensure the transparency of credit rating agencies, to keep managers' salaries within reasonable limits and to close tax havens. These initiatives are urgently needed. We hope that you will implement them and we are relying on you to do so. If it is no longer possible to achieve this within this parliamentary term, we will be making all these demands again on the first day of the new Parliament. When I hear the head of Citigroup, which has once again made a profit, and when I hear Mr Ackermann from Deutsche Bank, which has once again made a profit in the first quarter, I wonder whether these people believe that they can just go on as before, now that they have been bailed out by the state. No, we must put in place controls and transparency to ensure that these people cannot repeat what they have done in the past.

My third point is that I am fascinated when I hear the members of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats speaking. It is wonderful. You are saying all the things which we have been saying for years and which you have always voted against. You seem suddenly to have woken up. However, when it comes to Amendment 92, to a resolution to do more, in other words a fiscal stimulus of 1.5% of GDP, the PPE-DE does not vote in favour. Amendment 92 will be the litmus test for you when we vote on it at midday. On the question of solidarity, you have just said on behalf of your absent group, Mr Daul, that this is a good thing. Let us see if you vote in favour of Amendment 102, in which we are demanding solidarity.

One final remark which is of crucial importance for our group relates to Amendment 113 concerning tax havens. The people who serve us in restaurants, the drivers who drive our cars, the ground staff at the airports who unload our suitcases, are all taxpayers whose taxes are being used to prevent the big banks from failing, because governments and parliaments require these people to make a contribution. These are the people who must pay for the safety nets that have been put in place for the banks and the large companies. Now the managers of these large banks, who are still paying themselves bonuses of millions of euros, for example,

at ING which has deficits of several billion, are to be given the opportunity to put their money into tax havens and to avoid paying tax. This is a class war from above, which we at least do not want to be part of. Therefore, the question of whether we decide today that the European Parliament is against tax havens is a decisive question for the credibility of the PPE-DE and the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. You are talking like the socialists, but we want to see whether you vote like the socialists at midday.

We have put our three demands on the table and I would like to state quite clearly that if you do not vote in favour of them, then we will not have a joint resolution. Then it will be clear that we stand for social justice and that the PPE-DE can only produce empty words.

(Applause)

Graham Watson, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, over recent months, our Union has had more summits than our former colleague Reinhold Messner, and our Parliament has had a string of reports on improving the economy, but what those summits and those reports have done is provide Member States with stepping stones across the river of recession. Now we need the Council to cross without fear or flight, and I congratulate the authors of the Andersson, Ferreira and Kirilov reports. They offer a consistent and pragmatic perspective written in the light of the unemployment avalanche on our horizon. And their underlying message is this: jobs, jobs, jobs.

The Lisbon Strategy, employment guidelines, cohesion policy – these have always argued for flexicurity in our economies, for public investment in research and development, for the rapid transition to the knowledge economy. They are the foundations on which a healthy, dynamic and secure job market is built.

And from today's vantage point, one thing is clear to everyone – except, perhaps, some on the benches to the left. It was not the Lisbon Strategy that brought hardship to our kitchen tables, rather it is the Member States which ignored it that are suffering the deepest and will suffer the longest. So now is the time to put our foot on the floor and drive forward a 'Lisbon plus programme' and employment guidelines that reflect the realities of our Union.

National parliaments, regional governments, city halls: each must be empowered to rise to that challenge, and named and shamed when they do not. Nor should we accept heel-dragging over the need to protect the planet. The Council will consider the EU's negotiating stance for the Copenhagen climate conference. Just how much money, Mr Vondra, will the 27 allot to adaptation and mitigation in the developing world? Climate change will not stop as the economy slows, and the poorest countries will suffer – still – from our carbon consumption.

So recession must not mean inaction. Member States must commit the cash to counter climate change and to create green-collar jobs in the process, perhaps by using the money we have, as Claude Turmes suggests, to leverage more through the EIB or the EIF. However, the Council knows that the ravages of recession will return without root and branch reform of the financial system.

Next month's G20 is tasked with recasting the mould, and I welcome the tone taken by European leaders when they met in Berlin. The IMF should be financed effectively, tax havens should be subject to scrutiny, and financial institutions should be regulated robustly, with an effective European financial services authority overseeing the system: not to drag our economies back into the past, but to create an open, honest and transparent system of trade that is free and fair.

London, Paris, Berlin: each is keen to stress that Europe stands united, but the President of the Council tells us that differences persist. I hope the President of the Council will be here to report back to us from this summit, because he should be here today. If differences persist, it will not do. We need Europe to be strong in mind, fleet of foot and united in purpose over the weeks and months ahead, ready to strip out the toxic assets that are crippling bank balances, ready to reform bank practice to restore creditworthiness, and ready to accept that the current stimulus package may not be enough, because it is no good topping up the IMF if there is no global financial system to support, and while it is rough justice that responsible Member States must mitigate against default by those who lived it up, that may be the price to pay to avoid the contagion of economic meltdown.

Put simply, we need Council, Commission and Parliament to work together: coolly, calmly, collectively, preventing procedure from getting the better of purpose. Europe can fight fire no longer. The time has come for the fundamental reform that will provide jobs now and security in the future.

Cristiana Muscardini, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Vondra talked of ‘strengthening supervision’, but we want some information on how many OTC derivatives are still in the possession of European banks; how much the bill comes to at world level. It may be that the Commission and the Council will decide to freeze derivatives, at least to propose it at world level, and to suspend trading in these commodities. Is it possible that in banks that have been nationalised, these derivatives are still a toxic asset but obviously also worrying for development? Strengthening supervision also means that we must not only, as the Commission says, have the capacity to make a clean sweep of the banking system and review the system of regulation, but we must also make new proposals.

So, if we are worried about the crisis in the motor industry, we ought also to concern ourselves with small and medium-sized enterprises and the unfair competition coming from outside our borders. The Council has not yet decided to ratify and promote origin labelling, the only system that is not protectionist but protects consumers and products, as President Barroso himself just said. In order to help businesses we must, in addition to promoting new lines of credit, give small and medium-sized enterprises faster and cheaper access to mobility, if we want these businesses to adapt rather than go under. Many of them are now suffering a 50% drop in orders, forcing them to turn to the banks for help. The banks are not lending, however, and the bank shares have collapsed because of derivatives. It is a vicious circle. You must come out from this muddle and look for real solutions, not just useless proposals.

Rebecca Harms, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on the occasion of the fifth debate in this parliamentary term on the successes and failures of the Lisbon Strategy, I would like to ask how it can be that we have stated every year that the strategy is a successful one and that its success has been assessed and that we now suddenly wake up in the middle of the most serious crisis of recent times, as if it were a natural disaster. This should not be the case and a dishonest assessment of the Lisbon Strategy is, I believe, one of the problems which we must resolve.

A year ago in the same debate, the European Parliament urged the Commission to ensure the stability of financial markets because we had identified signs of an impending crisis. Mr Barroso, nothing was done in response to this request. We have now been discussing the collapse of the system for months, as Mr Schulz has said, without ensuring that the new regulations are mandatory. My view of this is slightly different to that of my fellow members. I believe that many members of the Commission and of the national governments are still convinced that a deregulated market made up of strong players can regulate itself. If we limit ourselves to injecting funds quickly into the banking system and to giving public guarantees, without establishing a completely new structure for the financial markets, we are sure to fail. We will not emerge from this crisis and there will be no real recovery.

The discussion on the links between climate policy, sustainability strategies and crisis management is just as inconsistent. Every year, we hear many comforting assurances on this subject. However, if you look at the current economic recovery plans at European and national level, you will see that they consist of a lot of words, but that the objectives of sustainability, climate protection and the efficient use of resources are still not being taken seriously. These economic recovery plans will not equip the European economy to face the future. They are simply more of the same.

Jiří Maštálka, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, the joint programme for growth and jobs, also known as the Lisbon strategy, came into being in 2005. It is now 2009 and, despite everything, we are faced with increasing poverty and an economic and financial crisis without parallel in history. Furthermore, the latest forecasts predict that the number of people unemployed in the EU will rise by almost 3.5 million in 2009. Despite all of the measures adopted to date, unemployment is rising. I am not the only one who thinks that something is wrong. The current situation shows the failure of the policies to date which have mainly supported the accumulation of large profits by large commercial and financial groupings, the creation of huge monopolies and a deterioration in the living standards of workers and ordinary people. Europe must take a different route. At its spring meeting, the Council should adopt a European strategy for solidarity and sustainable development and a new set of economic, social and environmental policies for supporting investment especially in the quality of work, improving qualifications, infrastructure support programmes, policies of cohesion, environmental protection and improved health and safety protection at work. A major problem confronting Member States, including the Czech Republic, is company relocations. The EU should set up a regulatory framework which would penalise firms for relocating, for example, by making EU financial support conditional on the fulfilment of obligations involving job protection and local development. Especially now, at a time of financial and economic crisis, we need not only solidarity but also strict and fast-operating rules and instruments as a common defence against the crisis. In this way, we would also be making a dignified link to the inheritance of Jean Monet, whom we are commemorating today.

Nigel Farage, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Mr President, the term ‘European solidarity’ has been bandied around this morning as if it were a given. I want to call that into question.

We cannot sign a blank cheque to bail out the countries of eastern Europe. We do not have the money. Economically, the plan is quite unsound and, most important of all, it is politically unacceptable to the taxpayers in France, Britain and Germany that we should do so. Yet the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Alistair Darling, seems now to be an advocate of this plan. He has lost his marbles! He says that this is the time for Europe to build on shared values of cooperation, as if we are one big, happy family.

Well, the Hungarian Prime Minister, Mr Ferenc Gyurcsany, rather blows that idea of European solidarity apart. He demands that the European Union bail out countries such as his to the tune of EUR 180 billion, and he says that, if we do not do that, he promises us that five million unemployed migrants will head west into our countries. That is nothing other than blackmail, and it shows the folly of having allowed countries like Hungary into this political Union and highlights even more deeply the folly of having open borders.

The only response I really hear in this House today is that somehow we have to have more European Union – that more power will work! Well, look: you were sent a message by the voters in France, by the voters in the Netherlands and by the voters in Ireland. You do not have the legitimacy to take more power for the European Union. The economic crisis will, I believe, be what voters will vote on in the European elections this year, and I hope this time they send you people a message that is so big and so loud that, for once, you simply will not be able to ignore it.

President. – Nigel Farage, we might not always be happy in our European family, but you belong to the family as well.

Jana Bobošíková (NI). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, in contrast to the previous speaker, I firmly believe that the forthcoming European Council should fully live up to the motto of the current Czech Presidency, which is ‘Europe without barriers’. I hope that the absent President of the Council, Mirek Topolánek, will not give way under pressure from the Obama administration to the temptation for new regulations and for more taxpayer’s money to be poured into the economy.

The forthcoming Council should also reject the green-lobby plan of the Barroso Commission involving massive multi-billion support for renewable energy. Economic theory and historically proven practice both clearly show that this will not do anything to reduce the economic collapse or to halt the rise in unemployment. On the contrary, it will only deepen the crisis and add another risk for the future, namely inflation, ladies and gentlemen. I do not believe that any sensible politician would want to contribute to a massive growth in prices and a devaluing of the savings of ordinary citizens. I hope that the Presidency will continue its stout defence of liberalisation together with the elimination of trade barriers and protectionism.

As we know, ladies and gentlemen, government regulation of economic policy in the US has played a key role in causing the current crisis. Instead of learning from this fact, EU bodies have approved an incredible 519 regulations and 68 directives since 1 July last year, in other words over the space of 9 months. If the Czech Presidency wants to be credible and useful in its motto of ‘Europe without barriers’, rather than organising more summits, it should immediately check through all EU legislation and throw out as many environmental, gender, social and employment restrictions as possible. The Council should also give some thought to how to rein in the bloated social state and to reducing high taxes and insurance. Only in this way can we achieve a rapid resumption of rational human and market activities, without which it will simply not be possible to overcome the current crisis.

Klaus-Heiner Lehne (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, sometimes I do not believe what I hear. Mr Schulz, the initiative on regulation and on transparency rules for hedge funds and private equity comes from the Committee on Legal Affairs.

In 2006, the members of the Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats on the Committee on Legal Affairs began actively asking for rules to be put in place. The legislative own-initiative report which we commissioned did not come about because the chairman of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, who we all know is a member of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, began a completely unnecessary dispute over authority. The result of this was that we spent months, if not years, in reaching an agreement and were then finally able to adopt the legislative own-initiative reports on this issue in September of last year, in the form of the Rasmussen and Lehne reports.

The person who spoke out against regulation in this area in the Council was Gordon Brown. He is obviously not a member of the PPE-DE, but belongs to your group. In recent years, Mrs Merkel and Mr Rasmussen have always spoken in favour of regulation in these areas in all the debates, both in the European Council and the G8.

The problem lies in the fact that the socialists in the European Union have always been a major obstacle to the inclusion of these non-regulated areas. Opinions have recently changed and that has resulted in us being in the position in which we now find ourselves. This is one of the historical facts in this area. I simply want to say that there is a big difference between the rhetoric which we are hearing now and the reality of recent months and years. Unfortunately, that is the case.

Finally, I would like to mention a number of areas of common interest. Today, the atmosphere between the parliamentary groups during the preparation for the resolution on the Lisbon process in the steering group was exceptionally good. For this reason, we have come to an agreement in almost every area and produced a good resolution.

We should not discuss this until we are blue in the face. Instead, we should make it clear that this is an area of common interest. The citizens of Europe expect us to act jointly in this crisis and not to oppose one another.

(Applause)

Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (PSE). – Mr President, this is the worst crisis since 1929 and it is getting worse: unemployment is in free fall now.

What I said to the President of the Commission a couple of months ago was: 'Please do not oversell what the European Council decided in December 2008. Please do not paint too rosy a picture of Europe.' However, that is exactly what you are doing. You have not made a financial stimulus of 3.3% in Europe – you have not! When you talk about automatic stabilisers, it is already in the prognosis. According to the Commission in January, the prognosis is -2%; now the European Central Bank tells us it is -3%. When you talk about a financial stimulus of 1.5%, it is not 1.5%, because, according to the Bruegel Institute, it will be 0.9%, which is documented.

Now we have the following situation: we are not taking care of employment, unemployment is in free fall, and your stimulus in Europe is not 3.3% but 0.9%. If you are now telling us to wait for better times and if you agree with Jean-Claude Juncker, who said yesterday that we have done enough, then I say: you have not done enough – people expect more from Europe than you are saying today.

My point is the following: in a few weeks, you will meet Mr Obama, the new President of the United States. He is coming with an investment package of 1.8% to his gross national product. We are coming with less than half. How could you imagine that Europe would put itself in a position where we are the ones who are doing less than our American friends, and where we are the ones who are demanding more of our American friends? How could you imagine respect for the European Union?

What I am saying is that we need to do more and we need to devise a comprehensive plan, which will cover the summit on 19 March – which is nine days from now – the summit in London, on 2 April, the summit on employment in May in Prague and the June summit. I appeal to you, President of the Commission, to make a comprehensive, new recovery effort. If we do not do that, we will lose. It is not about getting better times next year: this is a fundamental world crisis that we need to take seriously.

My final point concerns solidarity. The time has come not to accept new demarcation lines between those who have been members of the European Union for many years and those who came to the European Union with a promise that this would be a better time for ordinary people. Let us now avoid new economic demarcation lines between the new ones and the old ones. Let us show solidarity in real terms. That is why I ask you, President of the Commission, to consider new financial possibilities to help our new friends – Eurobonds is one possibility, the European Investment Bank is another. Please, take it seriously and let us not do too little too late, like they did in Japan, but let us show that Europe is about people, Europe is about showing solidarity with the weakest countries in this Union.

Jules Maaten (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, now that the original period of the Lisbon Strategy is coming to an end, we can see that the objectives which the Heads of Government prescribed in 2000 have not been adequately met. Particularly in the current economic crisis, though, it is of paramount importance for the

Lisbon Strategy to be taken seriously. Had this been the case, Europe would probably have been better able to stand up to the economic setbacks.

One of the key agreements in the Lisbon Strategy is the intention to spend 3% of Gross Domestic Product on research and development: two thirds financed by the private sector and one third by government. The fact, however, that hardly any country in the European Union has met this objective acts as a brake on innovation in the European Union. In a worldwide crisis, Europe will need to find the strength within itself to bring the economy up to the required standard once more.

At the same time, it is, of course, surprising, that a considerable share of the EU's budget should still be used to over-subsidise the old economy that includes agriculture and regional funds, while the targets for investments in research are not being met. There are plenty of options. Just think of clean environment or medical technologies or the growing sector of European computer games, for example, where specific support is proving effective.

Mr President, a dynamic and highly innovation-oriented economy can help new industries, technology and products get off the ground. This is precisely what is needed to recover from a recession. The crisis is allowing us, and indeed forcing us, to carry out desperately needed reforms.

I would urge the Member States to take their own agreements seriously, because when major goals are set, we need to have the determination to achieve these. If not, the EU will lose its credibility. Common policy requires an all-out effort from everyone and does not allow any slacking from any of the Member States.

Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, everything points to the fact that the ten-year goals of the Lisbon Strategy will end in a fiasco. Neither that strategy nor the constantly referred to Treaty of Lisbon is a real answer to the global economic crisis. During the forthcoming Council, the Prime Minister of Ireland will inform us of the steps taken to incorporate the Treaty of Lisbon. Following the example of the French and the Dutch, Ireland rejected the amended version of the European Constitution in a referendum. The citizens of that country could not be persuaded to relinquish part of their sovereignty in favour of a bureaucratic structure named the European Union. Presently, instead of waiting for a ruling from the German Constitutional Court which might finally bury the Treaty, attempts are being made to persuade the Irish with promises of privileges which are not to be found in the document which has been submitted.

In the face of a huge economic crisis, I appeal for an end to pointless internal EU disputes and for specific measures to be taken based on the existing treaties and in a spirit of solidarity.

Claude Turmes (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, in this time of crisis, we need a strong impetus at European level.

Nation states acting alone will be unable to give a sufficiently strong and coordinated response. We therefore urgently need a boost from Europe. What are we seeing again today, though? A Commission which, like its President, is tired, lacking in vision and bereft of political courage. A recovery plan of EUR 5 billion is not a recovery plan since 50% of the projects on the list will see no investment in 2009 or 2010 because the licences for carbon sequestration, for example, will not be in place!

Mr Daul is quite correct. Now is the time for us to show solidarity and innovation. If the Commission heeds Margaret – 'I want my money back' – Merkel and draws up a list that gives more money to the strong economies than to our colleagues in the countries of the East that need our support right now, we will be unable to make progress.

We therefore need innovation in two areas. First, we should not squander these EUR 5 billion on State aid. Instead, we should concentrate the money on the European Investment Bank. The Bank is currently increasing its capital by EUR 76 billion and is negotiating with the European Central Bank to make improvements in relation to liquidity. Therefore, we should use most of the EUR 5 billion as guarantee funds to leverage EUR 20, 25 or 30 billion of public and private investment. Secondly, we must widen this recovery plan to include green technologies, renewable energies and investments in buildings in Europe's towns and cities.

At present, President Obama is allocating 10 times more venture capital to green technologies than Europe is. We are therefore losing the battle when it comes to the next big thing in the economy.

Sahra Wagenknecht (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the decisive question in relation to all the economic recovery plans which are being put in place throughout Europe is, of course: who will receive the money? Will more blank cheques be drawn up for the banks, although in the long run,

it would be significantly cheaper for the taxpayer if they were nationalised straight away? Should we relieve the burden on large companies and high wage earners although they have benefited from tax concessions across the whole of Europe for years? The more money is wasted on things like this, the more likely it is that the programmes will fail and that the European economy will find itself in a very dangerous downward spiral.

The long-term policy of privatisation, deregulation and liberalisation has resulted in an increasing concentration of wealth among the top ten thousand. In addition, it was this policy which was responsible for the crisis that we find ourselves in today. Anyone who believes that the crisis can be overcome by continuing this policy with just a few modifications has completely failed to understand the situation. What we need is exactly the opposite. Instead of buying up banks' toxic assets, we should be spending taxes on renovating schools and hospitals and on greening the European economy. If public funds are given to private companies, the rule of no taxes without guaranteed jobs and, in particular, no taxes without public ownership rights must apply, so that the state and, above all, citizens can benefit from any future earnings. The best economic recovery plan of all would be a radical redistribution of wealth and assets from top to bottom. The low pay sector in Europe must be reduced in size rather than continually being fostered. We need higher minimum wages and better social services in Europe. We need tax rates which ensure that the millionaires and profiteers from the old finance market party take responsibility for the huge losses which have been incurred, not the majority of citizens who have not benefited at all from the financial boom. I believe that social justice is now the only sensible economic policy. It is the only way of bringing this disastrous crisis to an end.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM). – (SV) Mr President, the Lisbon Strategy is among the EU's best projects. Member States are to voluntarily reform their economies to create prosperity and an ability to adapt, both to foreseen changes such as an ageing population, and to unforeseen changes such as collapsing financial markets. The idea behind the strategy is to promote efficient markets, entrepreneurship, education, research and stable state finances, and now we are being tested.

If, when the financial crisis occurred, we had all had a flexible economy, the right monetary policy and sound state finances, Europe would have coped a lot better. We did not have these things, however. The Lisbon Strategy has not been implemented while, at the same time, the euro has resulted in much too easy a monetary policy for Ireland, Spain, Italy and Greece. In addition, several countries have been able to mismanage their public finances under the protective umbrella of the euro. The imbalances are therefore huge. The Lisbon Strategy is a good idea that has been botched. The euro is a bad idea that has exacerbated the problems.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is in this time of crisis that the value and usefulness of structures will be shown, and this crisis is showing us that the Europe of Brussels is no use at all. The recovery plan, pompously termed 'European', is, in fact, the sum of the finances decided on by the Member States. The contribution from the European budget accounts for only a very small part of it.

Whilst EUR 200 billion is being given to support the real economy and jobs, EUR 2 billion of it is going to the banks, with no guarantee that they will use the money to finance companies and private individuals. Privatised profits, public ownership of losses: this is the latest word from these economic policies, be they liberal or socialist.

Is it a case of European solidarity or support for the States? The participants of the informal summit of 1 March collectively rejected conditionality for aid given to the automotive sector, for the sake of the market and of competition. There has been no change in policy, no change in logic, and no break with the system that led us to catastrophe! We are on the edge of the precipice and, in a few days' time, the Heads of State and Government are going to ask us to take a great leap forward.

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE-DE). – (NL) Mr President, as coordinator of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats for regional policy, I should like to say that the desired move towards a more flexible approach and a more emphatic focus on investment and employment are becoming a reality. Precisely in this time of crisis, cohesion policy has its uses when it comes to Community investments. At the moment, we deploy an annual sum of some EUR 50 billion, and 65% of it goes to the priority areas in the Lisbon agreements. In doing so, we make an active contribution, qualify workers and take all kinds of regional initiatives for the years following the crisis.

The PPE-DE would like to maintain this integrated financial approach, rather than bring about any more fragmentation. The idea behind adopting a more flexible approach is to accelerate expenditure schedules, simplify approval and deal with the preparation costs effectively, extend the EIB's scope considerably by means of specific programmes, including sustainable reconstruction in the urban environment and more

scope for energy efficiency, not least in the old Member States. I welcome these moves towards a more intensive approach and flexibility.

In March II, we will hold a priority debate in this plenary meeting about the adjustments to the cohesion policy. We will also adjust the regulations for the funds accordingly, and lay the basis for a new cohesion formula: territorial cohesion, the framework for the period after 2013.

As was confirmed a moment ago, we are committed to high-quality activities, including clusters, R&D, innovation and rural development, and we will ensure that the knowledge economy and competitiveness in Europe are given a shot in the arm. This applies to all the regions across all the Member States. In this way, Europe will remain visible, and we will contribute to greater solidarity in Europe, even after the period of crisis.

Edit Herczog (PSE). – Mr President, I would like to start by responding to Mr Farage. If so far it was not certain that Parliament would be united, I think Mr Farage convinced all of us that we must remain united as a European Union.

The systematic crisis has hit the EU and we have to ask ourselves why our Lisbon Strategy of 10 years could not save us. Could we have a better target? Could we have a better delivery? Could we do it in a more cognate manner, or were we waiting for somebody to do it instead of us?

The Socialist Group answer is that it is right to have a single, comprehensive strategy for the future, to drive competitiveness and social and environmental sustainability in one single strategy. The Socialist answer is that we need delivery on Lisbon targets for all of Europe and we need it for all Europeans, including the most vulnerable, the poor ones.

We need to stabilise the financial markets and reduce the risk of similar crises for the future. But we will not support policies which drive our resources to tax havens and to the bank accounts of the few. We need to stabilise real economies throughout Europe for all sectors, and especially the small and medium-sized enterprises, but we have to take the responsibility of supporting employment and not just allow those companies to generate profits.

We need to go for R&D innovation and the digital switch-over, as well as building up skills to enable all citizens of Europe to use those technologies. We will commit funds to save knowledge throughout IPR policies. We need to stabilise Europe as a whole but we have to look beyond Europe to even more vulnerable parts of the world and we will not build new demarcation lines within the European Union.

We need to mobilise actors to act. Action, action, action, and delivery. Words alone will not drive us to succeed. It is not enough to do a lot but it is necessary to do enough. We ask the Commission, we ask the Council to go beyond the Spring Summit and deliver our messages to the G20. This is what people in the street are waiting for from us. Let us act together.

Ona Juknevičienė (ALDE). – (LT) I would like to draw attention to some circumstances which seem important to me in resolving the matter of retaining and creating new jobs. Firstly, this is a global economic crisis which is forcing us to rethink and re-evaluate the Employment Strategy. Secondly, we must make a critical evaluation of what we have already created, and of the effectiveness of implementing the strategies we have adopted. Therefore, I urge the Commission to assess very critically how Community Members are using funds intended to stimulate employment. The practice in force until now of mostly allocating funds towards qualification, requalification and various kinds of training is, to my mind, ineffective. Investing in small and medium-sized businesses and micro-credits are the most effective measure to create new jobs. Funds from both the Social Fund and Globalisation Fund could be used more effectively to this purpose. Member States must submit reports on the use of Social Fund and Globalisation Fund money, indicating, in particular, how many new jobs have been created. There must be penalties for inefficient use. The number of employees taking so-called voluntary redundancy is increasing. They are left without a job, without social or financial support. Therefore, we ought to involve unions here to protect the interests of our people. I urge the Commission and Member States to unite on this important matter.

Guntars Krasts (UEN). – (LV) Thank you, Mr President. In the current crisis situation, it is better to do more, rather than to wait. Therefore, the proposed economic stimulus instruments should certainly receive our support. For the new Member States in eastern Europe, however, with few exceptions, the international lending markets have closed their doors, there is an outflow of capital, and western European banks, which account for the majority of the market in the region, have changed the expansive lending policies they were

pursuing not long ago for a more cautious approach. The opportunities for these Member States to use financial and fiscal instruments are limited, or completely non-existent. In addition, in the majority of those countries preparing to join the eurozone, the convergence criteria will, in the medium term, also limit what economic stimulus measures can be taken. The only real instrument for stimulating the economy and for the implementation of the Lisbon strategy in those countries is finance from the European Union's funds. In obtaining funds, however, finding co-financing may be a problem, and that may lengthen the time taken to obtain funds. In order to stimulate the economy in eastern Europe we need urgent agreement on changes to the rules for obtaining European Union funds. The procedures for receiving funds need to be significantly simplified, the volume of state and private sector co-financing needs to be reduced and the deadlines for obtaining resources need to be extended. We need to find real opportunities to use financing from the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the acquisition of funds. These decisions will send an important signal for the recovery and stabilisation of the market in eastern Europe. Thank you.

Elisabeth Schroedter (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Commissioners, thank you. We must take the opportunity offered by the financial crisis to undertake radical greening of the European economy and to put a stop to climate change.

However, the Commission is not making use of this opportunity and is relying on a rescue package involving outdated concepts such as road building and the car industry. Even investment in ailing economic structures seems to be a possibility. This is not a forward-looking concept which would stop people from worrying about the loss of their livelihoods. The relaxation in the rules for the use of the Structural Funds must be aimed solely at sustainable, environmentally-friendly investment. Without a climate check of this kind, the co-financing must not be increased.

Commissioners, I believe that your approach of using the financial crisis to erode the rights of workers is also a cynical one. The posting directive should reinforce workers' rights and not help to weaken them. Reform of this kind is long overdue. What you are offering in the new document is unacceptable.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) The neoliberal Lisbon Strategy has been one of the European Union's basic instruments for promoting financial deregulation, privatising public services, liberalising markets and world trade, deregulating labour relations and damaging workers' rights. The proposals on the Working Time Directive and flexicurity are clear examples of this.

There is no sense in continuing to insist on developing the Lisbon Strategy when the economic and social crisis which the application of this Strategy has helped to create is getting worse. We therefore need to break with these policies of neoliberal capitalism, which is responsible for worsening unemployment, precarious work and poverty and which has increased social, regional and territorial inequalities. We need an integrated European strategy for solidarity and sustainable development which is based on defending productive sectors and public investment, by effectively boosting Community funds to support countries with weaker economies, which respects nature and creates jobs with rights, and which promotes public services, increases purchasing power and ensures a fair distribution of income to reduce poverty. This is exactly the opposite to what the Commission and the Council are proposing.

Johannes Blokland (IND/DEM). – (NL) Mr President, during the debates on the Spring Summit in recent years, we urged the Member States to work on the Lisbon process. After all, economic growth and low inflation provided scope for reform. Reform was necessary in the competition with up-and-coming economies and is, indeed, still needed.

The current crisis shows that Member States that responded to this request now perform better than others. The other Member States show major budget deficits, and the fact that the Member States that were deaf to our request are now transferring these deficits is threatening the stability of our currency.

I should like to ask the Commission to monitor Member States to ensure they observe the Stability Pact. Only in this way can we avoid the costs of this crisis getting out of hand. Temporary support measures that meet the sustainability test can therefore be applied on a limited scale. In addition to all new plans, it is obvious that old agreements should be observed.

Sergej Kozlík (NI). – (SK) Western Europe likes to talk about the need to assist the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to overcome the crisis. However, the very same people, or Mr Sarkozy to be precise, speak of these countries as a black hole which represents a risk for the European Union. I reject such a trivial generalisation of a problem which is affecting western countries in exactly same way. The result of such

pronouncements is a loss of faith in the institutions of the Central and Eastern European countries and they look more like a stab in the back than a form of assistance.

European leaders last week rejected protectionism, which would have meant erecting a new iron curtain across a united Europe. At the same time, however, the European Commission has approved enormous state aid for French car makers. However, this unequal and discriminatory approach is also apparent in other areas and particularly in agriculture. Europe is becoming two-faced and the Euro sceptics will reap the rewards of this.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE-DE). – Mr President, this debate is about jobs, and jobs and new prosperity. That is why I am a little surprised to hear, from the Socialist Group, criticisms of those who have been responsible for realistic policies in Europe, because the Socialists, more than anyone else, called for lower interest rates at the peak of the economy, just as they implemented monetary policy in the US. It is lax monetary policy, more than anything else, that has eroded the US economy. Mr Schulz should feel thankful that Europe and the European Central Bank did not listen to him, because, if it had, the European economy would have been much worse off. I appreciate we can agree on that point.

That also goes for the policy that you are recommending today, because now you are talking about Eurobonds which, among other things, would lead to higher interest rates for the countries of Central Europe. That is not solidarity in a time of financial crisis, and we would do well not to listen to Mr Schultz this time either.

We need to take action, but we need to take the right actions in order not to deepen the crisis and to secure stability.

(Interjection from the floor)

No, you have not been in power, but you are guilty of a lot of things too, and if we had listened to you we would have been worse off. That was an agreement between you and me, was it not? I appreciate the consensus in Parliament that your policy was wrong.

Mr President, what we need now is stability. We need to abide by competition rules and state aid rules in order to secure open barriers and trade, because exports need more imports and imports need exports. That is the way we can achieve more jobs.

Guido Sacconi (PSE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, one minute is only enough for a telegram. The title of mine, which I shall send to the European Council, has already been conveyed by Mr Schulz and Mr Rasmussen, who said that more must be done, above all with regard to the social emergency, through new tough financial and fiscal policies. Let me add an additional message: it is, of course, vitally important as we go through this crisis to minimise the social impact, but it is also important to hold a firm course so that we will know whether we are to emerge from it as winners or losers in terms of global competition, which will become increasingly fierce in the search for a new green, smart, low-carbon economy.

Therefore, all measures at all levels, from local to European, must be consistent with this objective. The Council needs to give a strong mandate for the negotiations in the run-up to Copenhagen so that we do not miss this opportunity, which is also an economic one. The mandate must be supported with the necessary funding of developing countries that will enable them to join with us.

Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE). – *(NL)* Mr President, this crisis is a test for Europe. Citizens now expect Europe to act, and this is why it is mystifying that many national leaders, even now, remain caught in the 'each to his own' policy. Europe is not the sum total of 27 times the national interest. In this respect, it would be a capital error to divide Europe into east and west once again.

Mr President, the Liberals would like to invest in the future, not in the mistakes of the past. The objectives of the Lisbon Strategy should not be put on ice. If anything, we should be more committed to education and research, innovation, sustainability and a strong European market.

Mr President, bankers who squander our money are despicable, but Mr Schulz, politicians who now run up deficits and debts on the back of younger generations are just as irresponsible. The Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe subscribes to the gist of the Ferreira report. Only with actual European and future-oriented solutions can we meet this crisis head-on. It is now or never for Europe.

Dariusz Maciej Grabowski (UEN). – *(PL)* Mr President, a true strategy for economic recovery is essential for the European Union. For that strategy to be effective, it must fulfil the following conditions. Firstly, the

EU needs a larger budget, and not one reduced from 1% to 0.8% of GDP, as some countries are advocating. Secondly, freedom of budgetary and tax policy should be restored, and attempts to impose and standardise these policies abandoned. Thirdly, the pressure being put on new Member States to enter the eurozone should be ended. Fourthly, precise control of the flow of finance capital should be introduced and transfer of capital from new Member States to rich ones stopped. Today, that predatory procedure runs to tens of millions of euros and is ruining new Member States. Fifthly, we should direct support and aid first and foremost to countries and regions which have been worst affected, and not, as is being done today, close down shipyards in Poland, while in France and Germany, jobs are being protected. Sixthly, the program of infrastructure investment should be directed at eliminating differences and underdevelopment, especially in the new Member States.

Csaba Óry (PPE-DE). – (HU) Mr President, we are all aware that under the circumstances of the current economic crisis, the importance of the employment policy and the Lisbon Strategy has increased, and therefore we, the European legislators and decision makers, must strive to make the implementation of the employment policy guidelines as effective and successful as possible. As the result of the vote in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs has also demonstrated, there is complete agreement among the political groups that the employment policy guidelines for the period between 2008 and 2010 constitute a suitable – and yet sufficiently flexible – framework for the objectives to be attained. Within these frameworks, the task of the Member States is to determine the key aspects that are suited to their distinctive situations, and to flesh out the various guidelines with actual content. The framework system is thus a good tool, the creation of which is a joint European success. The task of the Member States, on the other hand, is to truly put into practice this outstanding tool.

Thus, there are two prerequisites for success: setting the right goals and the practical implementation of a policy that fits these objectives. The first prerequisite – let us say – has already been met, and therefore, in my view, we must focus our attention in the next period on following up on the fleshing out and application of the content of the employment policy guidelines by the Member States. We cannot ignore the fact that the divergent economic situations and debt levels among the various Member States mean differences in their freedom of movement when it comes to the size of the investment they can make in the area of employment and human resources. In another respect, however, we need to be united: that each Member State must increase the level of investment related directly to employment in proportion to its own capacity. We must recognise that the success of the economic stimulus packages launched by the Member States is closely related to the attainment of EU goals. This is why we must harmonise our approaches in the area of economic policy more closely than in the past and, in light of this, trusting that there is agreement among the political groups, I ask that we support the Andersson report and vote to adopt it.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

Pervenche Berès (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, Mr Vondra, Commissioner, Europe can do a great deal if it wants to but, to do so, it has to make the correct diagnosis: currently, however, it is under-estimating the crisis. It needs to provide the appropriate resources: currently, however, the recovery plan is not enough. It has to release the financial resources required: currently, however, the debate on the Eurobonds is at a standstill; it must be relaunched. If Europe wishes to act intelligently on the international stage, then it must also set an example in relation to the regulation and supervision of the financial markets.

Mr Barroso, your initiation of the work carried out by Jacques de Larosière's group has been useful, intelligent and exceptional. This work is now on the table. Do a Delors and use this work as a basis for implementation!

This report has been adopted unanimously, even though the group was composed of cultures and people of very different origins. The European consensus that we have sought for years has therefore been found.

If you allow the nations to tear themselves apart following this result, there will be no European supervision of the financial markets.

Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova (ALDE). – (BG) The contribution of the Cohesion Policy is becoming even more significant in the context of an economic crisis. The banking sector, closure of production capacity, lack of fresh money and the contraction of the labour market are basic problems for Member States. Until now, the Cohesion Policy had its own financial instruments, but the crisis is forcing the streamlining of appropriate, innovative solutions.

Support based on EU funds should now be aimed at the targeted areas. The Structural Funds should be used more actively and more in keeping with the situation. Member States should focus their attention on enabling the beneficiaries to control the funds. I rather hope that the Commission will simplify the procedures for the Structural Funds, which must not be done at the expense of controlling the distribution and spending of the funds. I believe that the report on the Cohesion Policy and investment in the real economy will provide ideas for dealing with the crisis and will be useful for subsequent measures aimed at stimulating economy activity which we are expecting from the European Union summit. Thank you.

Rolf Berend (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Kirilov's report primarily concerns changes to the three Structural Funds Regulations 2007-2013 with the aim of improving cash flow and liquidity in the Member States. This is one measure for combating the economic crisis which we can support unconditionally.

Member States are now required to make full use, for example, of the opportunities for supporting investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy in housing and the new investment opportunities in housing in general. These planned measures will contribute to accelerating, simplifying and increasing the flexibility of the use of the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Funds. I must emphasise that these measures do not conflict with free competition, social standards and the implementation of environmental and climate protection regulations within the Community.

It is now the responsibility of the Member States to guarantee the co-financing of the money provided by the European Structural Funds in order to be able to make full use of it. The demand in the report for increased simplicity in the administration and implementation of the funds is to be welcomed and supported.

Commissioners, we are looking forward to further proposals on this subject from the Commission in 2009. It is important to emphasise the significance for a successful economic recovery of measures to support employment and business. However, Member States should be urged to make extensive use of the Structural Funds for promoting or creating jobs in small and medium-sized businesses.

The committee has taken full account of our amendments. We must support this report unreservedly. Congratulations, Mr Kirilov.

Enrique Barón Crespo (PSE). – (ES) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, the best homage we can pay to Jean Monnet is to act with unity, decisiveness and perseverance, as he did in organising the logistical effort during both world wars – the effort by the Allies which enabled them to win the war. This means that we, the 27 Member States, must act together.

We, as socialists, would urge that this involves three priority actions: firstly, strengthening our stimulus and recovery plan in the budgetary sphere and also with regard to the scrutiny and organisation of Europe.

Secondly, we need to develop genuine solidarity between the 27 Member States. I do not know if the Czech Government and its parliament, who are sitting on the Treaty of Lisbon, know that in the second article of the Lisbon Treaty the word 'solidarity' appears for the first time.

Thirdly, we need to combat tax havens, the black holes of globalisation.

Chris Davies (ALDE). – Madam President, I want to refer to our strategy and preparations for the Copenhagen Conference on climate change later this year, where we have taken a leadership role, but one which is threatened by the economic recession and demands that we relax our standards. Let me give you one example.

More than three years ago, we agreed that new requirements would be placed on car manufacturers to change the air conditioning refrigerants they use, which currently have a global warming potential 1 400 times greater than carbon dioxide. We said that should take place in all new car models from 2011.

But now we hear that some manufacturers – led, I understand, by Ford and General Motors – are trying to exploit loopholes to get out of that obligation. Later this month, there is a meeting of the national type approval authorities. It is very important that Commissioner Verheugen takes a lead and makes it clear that we are not going to relax our standards, and that these refrigerants must be replaced by 2011.

If we weaken now, we open the floodgates to lobbying from industry across the board, and our leadership role on climate change will be seriously undermined.

Costas Botopoulos (PSE). – Madam President, these three very extremely important reports have been drafted by Socialist rapporteurs. This, of course, is not by chance. The thrust of these reports, the amendments that will be presented by the Socialist Members to improve them, and also I think today's debate, show very clearly that there are distinctive policies: distinctive right-wing and Socialist policies towards the crisis. The right-wing policy is pretty simple: the crisis is a bad thing but we need to be patient, it will pass; we need to take some technical measures and things will calm down by themselves and we must express our sympathy to the people who will be hit.

The Socialist position is much more complex. We say that we must attack the roots of the problem, the roots of the crisis, that we must radically change the economic paradigm, that we must change and that we must curb all the speculation that has led us to this financial crisis. This has not been a neutral crisis but a crisis inflicted by specific policies, mostly by right-wing governments.

Jean-Paul Gauzès (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in these times of crisis, our fellow citizens are expecting much of Europe. Europe must not let them down.

Of course, if we are being realistic, we have to acknowledge that European financial resources are limited, and we need to look at how they can be improved. However, Europe will come more to the fore and will have more success if it shows greater political will.

This involves firstly, of course, acting as a catalyst for the actions and efforts of the Member States, but also taking a coordinated approach at European level. The recovery plan is essentially a toolbox to promote restructuring. The role of the EIB must be strengthened.

Europe must act to define a clear, innovative economic strategy. Economic operators need prospects and legal stability. It is important, first, to put financial services in order so that the banking institutions can play their main role, which is to finance economic development.

The texts currently being prepared for directives on the capital requirements of banks and insurance companies, and the regulations on rating agencies, must contribute to this task. The text on rating agencies must implement the lessons learned from the proven shortcomings.

There is an equally urgent need to provide for European supervision of regulated financial activities. The report by the de Larosière group makes some useful and timely proposals that should be implemented quickly.

Europe also needs to be given a proper, effective, modern industrial policy. In this respect, we need to reconcile the needs for sustainable development and the requirement for a high-quality industrial base to produce wealth and create employment.

In these times of crisis, it is preferable not to hamper those sectors that are operating normally by producing rules or regulations whose effectiveness has not been properly shown. For example, in the automotive sector, which is today experiencing severe difficulties, it is important to extend the regulation exempting vehicle distribution, which expires in 2010.

We must also be vigilant, for example, when negotiating the bilateral agreement with Korea, as it could be very conducive to our industry.

Brian Simpson (PSE). – Madam President, my contribution today will be one that highlights the need for investment: investment in jobs; investment in our environment; and investment in all our economies. In that regard, investment in our transport infrastructure and, in particular, in our railway infrastructure, is crucial, not only in providing us with a world-class rail network but also in protecting and creating jobs and social cohesion.

Let us prioritise the electrification of our rail network, giving us both transport and environmental gains. Let us invest in our TENS transport network. Let us have a recovery plan with substance and with action, and not just words.

Doing nothing and letting the markets decide has failed. The time for concerted European action is now based on putting people first and vested interests last. We on this side of the House are not prepared to play Pontius Pilate, washing our hands of the problem. We want to act and we want to act decisively.

Péter Olajos (PPE-DE). – (HU) I am convinced that the current economic crisis has its roots in over consumption and in the environmental crisis, and that it is in this area that we must seek the solution as well.

We are coming to an important period with regard to climate policy since, at the end of this year, we must reach an agreement in Copenhagen on new common goals for combating global warming. The task is therefore great, and we must not err or procrastinate. The legal texts before us not only define the framework and set out the main guidelines, but the real, concrete steps to be taken are yet to come. In order to reach a 25-40% decrease in greenhouse gases, as the scientists recommend, and in order to halt the decline in biodiversity, we need significant financial resources.

In recent years, I had the pleasure of visiting, with Parliamentary delegations, Bangladesh, China, India and, most recently, Guyana, and my conviction in this regard has become even stronger as a result. On the one hand, we must support developing countries, but this can be done only through transparent, closely monitored investments and, on the other, the revenues from the European Union's emission trade auctions should also be used to support developing country's measures to promote adaptation. The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety recommends a total of EUR 30 billion for this purpose up to 2020. This is an enormous sum, and to use it properly is a great challenge.

Moreover, the struggle against climate change offers Europe an excellent opportunity to increase new technologies and create new jobs in order to promote energy security. The UN and the new US administration as well as several European governments have also recognised that in order to emerge from the global crisis, we need not only a fresh, effective energy source but also an engine that runs according to new organisational principles, for the current economic recession is concealing the true problem facing humanity and Europe, namely the environmental crisis. The green 'New Deal' is an historic opportunity to solve both crises at once.

Gianni Pittella (PSE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I think it was a mistake, above all on the part of the Commission, to underestimate the extent of the crisis initially, and that it is a mistake today to repeat ourselves at summits that produce declarations of principle but are not followed by coherent and practical decisions. The responses given by our reports to the very serious problems of the European public are convincing and up to the task.

The House is called on, however, to bridge a gap by introducing the Eurobonds instrument, repeatedly advocated by Mr Mauro, myself and almost 200 Members, an instrument – perhaps the only one – able to generate the financial resources that our lifeless budget does not have, to fund crisis measures, trans-European networks, clean energies, research and broadband, the fight against poverty and the Erasmus scheme for young people. The great Jacques Delors – I shall finish here – has shown us the way. Let us follow it with courage.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Madam President, with the backdrop of the global economic and financial crisis and the multi-billion stimulus packages, there is a huge opportunity to increase energy efficiency, to increase energy security from reliable renewable sources and to drive green technology in a green 'new deal'. In other words, to turn this crisis into an opportunity, and to the benefit of us all in the long term.

I welcome the two alternatives for innovative funding for combating global climate change in the recent Commission communication. As the original author of the resolution on today's paper, I urge Member States to act on these proposals and also, at next week's summit of Heads of State and Government, to honour the declaration of the summit of 12 December last, which should be put officially on the record, preferably along with the final text of the EU-ETS report, as otherwise it will not appear in the Official Journal.

For this – and I urge the President-in-Office, the Commissioner and Madam President to remember this – we need a tripartite declaration from all three institutions. This December declaration states: 'The European Council recalls that Member States will determine, in accordance with their respective constitutional and budgetary requirements, the use of revenues generated from the auctioning of allowances in the EU emissions trading system. It takes note of their willingness to use at least half of this amount for actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate and adapt to climate change, for measures to avoid deforestation, to develop renewable energies, energy efficiency, as well as other technologies contributing to the transition to a safe and sustainable low-carbon economy, including through capacity-building, technology transfers, research and development.'

It continues. 'In the context of an international agreement on climate change in Copenhagen in 2009, and for those who wish so, part of this amount will be used to enable and finance actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change in developing countries that will have ratified this agreement, in particular in least-developed countries. Further steps are to be taken at the spring 2009 European Council in this regard'.

I await eagerly an honourable outcome of the declaration from next week's meeting of Heads of State and Government.

Harlem Désir (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, too little, too late, inadequately coordinated, lacking in solidarity, undersized: these are the real reactions provoked by the European Union recovery plan and the Commission proposals at this stage.

The reason is really simple: looking at the initial forecasts, we are all obliged to acknowledge that the depth of the crisis was under-estimated, be it in terms of the truly spectacular fall in industrial production in the United Kingdom and France, for example, the fall in international trade and German exports, or the forecasts of increased unemployment. I therefore truly believe that, today, we are very far from a response that matches what is being implemented, for example, by the Obama administration in the United States.

There is, once again, a perceived lack of solidarity and a high degree of timidity. In March, we saw Ecofin refuse to increase the recovery plans, and we are seeing the countries of Eastern Europe be reduced to calling on the IMF. This is a lamentable failure where European solidarity is concerned; we are allowing more and more national rescue plans for the industrial sector and we are reduced merely to calling for a rejection of protectionism. The fact is, the only true response would be a European rescue and recovery plan for the automotive sector.

I believe that, today, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament's demand is extremely clear: we want massive investment. As we often refer to the crisis of 1929, let us look by way of comparison at the example of Roosevelt's New Deal, which spent 3.5% of GDP over seven years. For Europe, today, that would be the equivalent of EUR 400 billion per year over several years. We therefore believe that borrowing facilities and Eurobonds should be made available, that there should be huge investment in green innovation, in the insulation of buildings, in modern transport and in the energy sector, and that there should be a support plan for the victims of restructuring and unemployment, and an indication of how all those faced with unemployment can be helped, by means, for example, of extending the scope of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund.

Cornelis Visser (PPE-DE). – (NL) Madam President, in this time of economic crisis, the European Parliament should play a guard dog role, particularly when it comes to preventing protectionism.

We have established the internal market, which has brought us much prosperity, together. Not only in western Europe, but also in central Europe, have countries enjoyed the full benefits of this. We should not let these achievements slip out of our hands in the face of any old headwind. We in the European Parliament should oppose proposals such as those surrounding the support of the French automotive industry, which could adversely affect other European countries.

Parliament should also play a guard dog role when it comes to the strength of the euro. We cannot accept that countries should run up national debts without limitation. In Europe, we agreed to the so-called Stability and Growth Pact. We know that as a result of the financial crisis, we should temporarily offer more scope for supporting the banks. This should be an exception, though.

There is no need to provide any structural support to other sectors in the economy. Member States do not have the funds to do this, and if they were to borrow with Eurobonds, future generations would be saddled with the burden of debt and the euro would become weak. I am opposed to this.

In short, we should be a guard dog when it comes to fighting protectionism and protecting the value of the euro.

Libor Rouček (PSE). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, in my short contribution today, I would like to focus on an important area which I hope will be successfully discussed and resolved at the European Council meeting, and that is the area of energy policy. We all know that the European Union needs to strengthen its energy security and independence and to strengthen its energy infrastructure which means linking up and extending oil pipelines, gas pipelines and power lines between individual states and regions. We also need to increase our reserves of oil and natural gas. We want to increase the share of renewables, to increase the energy efficiency of buildings and products, and to increase investment in research and in measures for mitigating the effects of climate change. I firmly believe that the measures and investments that must be introduced in the area of energy policy cannot only solve our energy and climate problems but can also have a very positive and powerful effect at a time of economic crisis by kick-starting economic growth and increasing employment.

Rumiana Jeleva (PPE-DE). – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome the efforts made by the European institutions in outlining the measures for coordinated actions by Member States and the Commission in dealing with the economic crisis. As is already well known, the European Union's Cohesion Policy is making an important contribution to the European Economic Recovery Plan and is the Community's largest source of investments in the real economy. As a gesture in recognition of these efforts, the European Parliament supports the amendments to the regulation on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund, in order to simplify and speed up financial management of EU funds. I hope that the beneficiaries will gain from this simplification, those whom the funds are actually targeted at. This is particularly important for the European Union's poorer Member States.

One important task which still faces Member States is to guarantee the necessary funding so that EU resources are spent as intended. Without breaching the rules on free competition and the standards of good management, Member States should use the simplified procedures for funding projects. Thank you for your attention.

Atanas Paporizov (PSE). – Madam President, it is clear that the European aspect of the economic recovery plan and its financial backing is very negligible compared to the efforts of the Member States. I hope, however, that the Council will adopt a plan to support energy interconnections between countries so that a future gas crisis will be mitigated in its effects.

However, solidarity could be expressed by making more flexible the criteria for ERM2, the eurozone and the adoption of the euro for those countries wanting to join. It is clear that Member States that now have to make great efforts to maintain a stable currency exchange rate need more support to be able to pass all the necessary steps to become members of the eurozone and thus prevent the effects of the economic crisis. I hope that will be one of the decisions taken in the near future, bearing in mind that there is already flexibility for the existing Members.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) While I basically agree with the European Economic Recovery Plan, I would like to draw attention to two matters: the issuing of Eurobonds and expansion of the eurozone. The issuing of Eurobonds is neither an appropriate instrument to strengthen the eurozone, nor is the timing right in a Europe which is affected by the financial, economic and social crisis. We have 16 eurozone members, whose economies will receive support, but what about the other 11 countries? It is proposed that we should only allow the purchase of Eurobonds with Swedish and Danish Crowns. Where would this leave the new Member States which, for many objective reasons, are not in the eurozone? What is the cost of borrowing they would have to pay? Lithuania was not allowed to introduce the Euro because inflation was 0.07% above the indicator's maximum limit, although in 10 years, not a single eurozone member has met all the indicators. The Lithuanian Litas has already been pegged to the euro for 4 years. Is it not time to look more creatively at changes in the world and expand the eurozone, thus making it easier for the EU to exit the crisis?

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the title of Mr Kirilov's report, on which I congratulate him, suggests that we may also speak of an unreal economy. A virtual economy and virtual money have arisen, but the signatures of the bankers and auditors are real, indicating that everything is in order. It turns out, however, that this is not true, and that it is a bluff.

Today, we have to face up to the challenges of an economic and moral crisis. In this context, investment in regional development and cohesion is sensible and necessary. This will mean real kilometres of roads, modernised railway lines and airports. We should invest in knowledge and education and in innovative solutions, especially in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises. We should really restrict bureaucracy. This will produce jobs for thousands of people, thus providing them with a livelihood. It will also amount to genuine implementation of a policy of solidarity, and not protectionism. It will make Lisbon a reality.

Emmanouil Angelakas (PPE-DE). – (EL) Madam President, specific measures need to be taken to mobilise sectors of the economy so that they can be helped in dealing with the crisis.

More importantly, where they relate to regional policy and cohesion policy, it is certain that they concern the majority of citizens and enterprises, especially small and medium-sized enterprises.

Initiatives to simplify the regulations of the European Regional Development Fund and the other structural funds and measures such as strengthening investment in the use of renewable sources of energy in homes, simplifying regulations and paying advances and eligible expenditure and lump sums are certain to help towards maintaining jobs and the survival of small and medium-sized enterprises in this uncertain economic climate.

Efforts must be stepped up with other initiatives which the European Parliament awaits and will take an active part in formulating. The need to take measures which impact directly on financial support for citizens still remains.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) The European Union has never been in as critical a situation as now. Two fundamental principles are being called into question: solidarity and the unity of the internal market, due to protectionism. Martin Schulz is perfectly right. The European Commission has taken no concrete steps towards putting markets in order or regulating financial matters. If we do not safeguard our solidarity, the unity of the European Union may be shattered by selfishness and protectionism, for there are problems not only outside the eurozone but also within it. Greece, Hungary and others have similar problems. I would like to remind Mr Farage that western European banks, western European companies bought out the banks and businesses of the new Member States and now, shirking solidarity, they fail to do anything to make possible a secure financial basis.

Martin Schulz (PSE). – (DE) Madam President, thank you for allowing me to make a personal observation at the end of this debate. I would like to respond to the comments made by Mr Lehne.

I understood from what you said, Mr Lehne, that the crisis was caused by the socialists in Europe. Of course, we already knew that. It is a well-known principle in Germany that when the sun shines in the morning, the Christian democrats are responsible, but if there is ice and snow, that is the fault of the social democrats. We are all aware of this. However, you, the members of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, could now demonstrate whether you will put into practice what you, Mr Lehne, have said when you attacked me for saying something wrong – I may have been mistaken.

Therefore, I would ask you now to tell us about the Ferreira report, Amendment 113, which concerns solidarity between the Member States and the closure of tax havens. This is about our decision to ensure that the EU urges the G20 summit to close tax havens. Will you vote for or against the Ferreira report? Community solidarity between the eurozone and the states outside it and solidarity within the eurozone. Will you vote in favour? And finally the fiscal stimulus of 1% or 1.5% of GDP as the Community's attempt to bring the crisis to an end. Will you vote in favour? These are Amendments 92, 102 and 113 from the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. If you vote in favour, then you will receive an apology from me, Mr Lehne. If you do not vote in favour, then I would have to say that you are a person who makes big speeches and then does not vote accordingly.

Klaus-Heiner Lehne (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, thank you very much. I will be really brief. Firstly, of course, the socialists are not responsible for the crisis. No one in the Chamber has said that. We all know whose fault it is and this has been investigated in great detail. However, I have rightly pointed out that over many years, the socialists have been responsible for blocking the implementation of clear transparency rules relating to hedge funds and private equity and I have given examples of this. This is quite simply a fact.

As far as the amendments which have been referred to are concerned, I would like to mention just one point, the subject of tax havens. We are in complete agreement on this. The question is simply at which point we vote in favour of it. Today we will be debating Amendment 25 on the resolution concerning the Lisbon Strategy, which covers precisely this subject. The group will vote in favour of this. Therefore, I have no problems with the questions that have been mentioned.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – Mr President, we have had a very long and useful debate, and the Presidency is grateful to all the Members of this House for their comments.

They have rightly identified the very significant challenges that we currently face and, in particular, the consequences of the financial and economic crisis. As I pointed out in my introductory remarks, this issue will be at the centre of the debate at next week's European Council meeting. Despite the scale of the crisis, the Presidency considers that the European Union can agree on the various components of an approach which will take us forward.

There is no other option than to work together in the face of this deep crisis. I therefore support the many calls this morning for greater responsibility and more intensive cooperation. I also consider that we not only can and must act together to solve Europe's problems, but also that the European Union is well placed to be part of the global solution. This crisis may be deep, but if we work together, Europe has the necessary intellectual, financial, human and regulatory resources to continue to define and implement the appropriate responses.

Joseph Daul said that the next European Council is not just another summit, and he is certainly right. Delivering on a global solution starts with playing a leading role in the G20 conference in London at the beginning of next month. At yesterday's Council meeting, Ecofin ministers endorsed the terms of reference for the EU's participation in that important meeting. They agreed, in particular, on the need for closer international coordination of macroeconomic policies and global financial regulations based on increased transparency and accountability – and that brings us back to our debate on hedge funds and other sensitive issues. They all agreed on strengthened cooperation between the financial authorities at international level, on strengthening the IMF, and on the need to address the role of multilateral development banks in countering the effects of the crisis on the world's poorest populations.

While we are talking about the need for solidarity, we have to be aware that this European solidarity must be accompanied by nationally responsible policies on sustainable financial development in Europe. It is true that the Americans are spending, but they are not asking for assistance from the IMF, and they do not have a Stability Pact ensuring the integrity of their currency zone. We have to invest in our future, but it must be done in a way that will not undermine the long-term sustainability of our public finances or the rules of the game on the internal market.

Many of you referred this morning to the very real concerns of citizens in the face of rising unemployment. Martin Schulz said that the issue is 'jobs, jobs and jobs' – and he is right. We do indeed need to maintain employment, and while many measures remain the competence of the Member States, there are certain things we can do. Let me give one example. Yesterday, Ecofin reached an agreement on reducing VAT in labour-intensive services sectors, such as restaurants, etc. If you remember, this had been on the agenda for many years without a solution being found, and it was only yesterday, under the presidency of my country, that we were able to reach agreement on that sensitive issue.

Employment should be, and is, the key theme of the three reports before us this morning. We intend to address that issue at next week's meeting. It is a key part of the Lisbon Strategy. I agree with those who say that the current crisis is not a reason for jettisoning the Lisbon Strategy. It is, in fact, all the more reason to ensure that we deliver on the Strategy's key aims.

The Presidency is devoting particular attention to this issue, which is why we have called an additional meeting in early May on the problem of growing unemployment. Next week, we intend to agree some concrete orientations which will create a basis for our discussions and possibly for the decisions to be taken in May.

Some of you also mentioned the need for reaching an agreement on mitigating and adapting to climate change, in preparation for the meeting in Copenhagen. Graham Watson asked how much we will have to pay. I think that is premature. There are some estimates – such as in the Commission communication on this particular matter, which contains estimates from the various NGOs and institutions – and these are pretty high. However, it would be premature to give an estimate now. We have to wait for the US and other stakeholders in the process to inform us of their plans, and that is what we intend to find out about at the meeting with Mr Obama's Administration in Prague in early April. To open the account now would not be the correct tactical move.

We shall, of course, keep you fully informed of all aspects of the next European Council meeting, and I will ensure that Prime Minister Topolánek is fully aware of the views expressed here this morning. He will report to Parliament, at the next plenary session, on the outcome of the European Council, and I look forward to a constructive exchange of views on that occasion.

Günter Verheugen, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I agree with those who said that for a long time, the crisis has been underestimated and not properly understood. Therefore, it is probably a good thing if we can at least agree at the start that we do not know how serious this crisis will become. In addition, we do not know how long the crisis will last and therefore we also do not know whether we have already done enough. I am sorry for once to have to contradict Mr Juncker.

We do not even know whether what we have done will have an impact or not. At the moment, we do not even know that. The only thing that we really know is that we will not emerge from this crisis unless we are very quickly able to make the financial sector function again.

This was the start of the problem and, in the meantime, it has become relatively clear how all of this came about. We also know why the measures already taken to stabilise the financial sector have not had any impact, or at least not a satisfactory impact. This is because the banks are aware that they are still faced with a series

of problems. The banks are currently making provision for risks because they know that some of the risks on their books have not yet been disclosed. We must take the appropriate political measures in this respect.

However, one thing is clear. The financial sector does not have the option of returning to the time before the crisis. Anyone who imagines that the state and the European Union is now responsible for regulating this, and that afterwards everything will go on just as before, is very much mistaken. It is clear that we need a robust, long-term supervisory system for the financial sector and the financial institutions which does not only cover Europe. It is very important that, together with our partners, we put in place a system of global governance. We will only be able to do this in cooperation with our partners if we Europeans take a clear, joint approach. The more we can agree on this question, the better our chances are of achieving the results we want. If the capitals of Europe send out conflicting signals to Washington, Beijing and Tokyo, the prospects of establishing a useful system of global governance are small.

However, we are agreed that the current situation is potentially highly explosive in social terms, simply because whatever we can do to stabilise the financial sector will not be sufficient to support companies in the real economy which are in difficulties as a result of the financial crisis. We all know that.

The European response to the crisis in the real economy, the crisis amongst businesses and industry, is a response which focuses on jobs. This really is not about dividends for shareholders or bonuses for managers. It is about ensuring that the people who have very little or, indeed, no responsibility for the crisis, in other words, the workers, can keep their jobs. It is essential for them to keep their jobs because otherwise, they cannot live an independent life in freedom and dignity.

We want to protect jobs in the European economy, which is why the spending programmes were necessary. We can argue about whether or not they could or should have been larger. However, the problem is that there is no flexibility in this respect in the Community budget. It is easy for us in the European Parliament or in the European Commission to say that we need a large economic recovery package, we must pump large amounts of money into the economy, because it will not be our money, we do not have any money. It will always be money from the Member States and please do not forget that the national parliaments, of course, also play a role here.

We have tried to ensure that the spending programmes are organised in such a way that the short-term necessities do not put the long-term objectives at risk. This is precisely what several speakers from all the parliamentary groups have said, in other words, that we are undergoing an economic transformation, a transformation to a low-carbon economy, to a resource-efficient economy and to a knowledge-based economy. This transformation must continue during the crisis. This is why we are telling companies not to cut back on research and development or on innovation and to keep their core workforce in place. The financial measures that we take must support these objectives. I agree with everyone who says that things could perhaps have been done better. However, we must always remember that the money which is being spent here is not European Union money. It is money from the Member States and in the Member States, there are other factors to be considered as well as what we believe to be right in this case. The economic model of the Lisbon Strategy, which was also discussed today, does not involve an independent market. The Lisbon Strategy is not based on the assumption that the best market economy is one which is left to develop on its own in radical free market terms. Instead, the strategy states that the market needs rules if it is to meet its social and environmental responsibilities. Politicians are responsible for establishing these rules and we must not be diverted from this task. This is why I believe that the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy remain unchanged and that 'How is it that we have got into this crisis despite the Lisbon Strategy?' is actually the wrong question to ask. A different economic strategy in Europe would not have been able to prevent the macroeconomic imbalances and the mistakes made on the international financial markets which led to this crisis.

Let me conclude by saying that we want to ensure that as many European companies as possible come through the crisis intact. This means that we must help them to obtain funding. At the moment, this seems to me to be the main problem, because the credit crunch is affecting both large and small organisations.

The European Investment Bank is doing whatever it can. We should thank the European Investment Bank for its highly flexible approach. However, it has now reached the limits of what it can do. It is already clear that it will not be possible to meet the lending requirements of large and small European companies in the second half of this year, because the European Investment Bank is already at its limits. Everyone should be aware that the situation will become very serious and therefore it is worthwhile considering whether we in this Parliament can improve the situation of European companies, for example, by quickly considering and

adopting proposals from the Commission which aim to prevent European companies from having to pay unnecessary costs.

We have presented proposals which could result in European companies' costs being reduced by up to EUR 30 billion per year. The rapid adoption of these proposals would make an important contribution to overcoming the crisis.

The Commission is convinced that in the run-up to this summit, the opportunities and risks of European integration will become clearer than they have seldom been before. The opportunities obviously involve gathering our forces together, acting in a coordinated and focused way, and using all our creativity with the aim of emerging stronger from this crisis. This will allow us to compensate for the fact that, unlike the United States of America, we cannot make central decisions which are implemented everywhere, but instead we must ensure that 27 Member States agree.

However, at the same time, the risks are more obvious than they have ever been – the risks which we will all be exposed to if one or more Member States in this situation opt for protectionism or economic nationalism instead of solidarity and a joint approach. Without a shared compass which will guide us through this crisis, we will unfortunately all get lost together in the fog that caused the crisis.

Elisa Ferreira, *rapporteur*. – (PT) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the crisis is worse than we expected and unemployment will rise more than we predicted. There are good reasons to think that the planned European stimulus will not be sufficient, but it is already clear that it is taking too long to reach the people.

Parliament's position is, and has been, firm and clear, and I hope it will continue to be so. Our objective is to maintain employment and create new jobs with both territorial and social cohesion and solidarity. At this time of crisis, the people cannot resign themselves to a Europe which has no answer, to a Europe which is powerless to tackle the problems that they are facing. What will Parliament therefore ask of the Commission? Through these reports, it is, of course, asking for national actions to be coordinated and for the Commission to use every means currently available to it in order to act. It is also giving the Commission every opportunity, as a budgetary authority, so that this can happen. It is asking the Commission to launch a clear European initiative for employment and saying that it is essential to have a scheduled agenda for implementing financial market regulation measures and also for offering credit to the real economy. However, what is Parliament asking of the Council? It is asking the Council, in particular, to rediscover the political will that is at the heart of the construction of the European project. The European Union is about competition, but it is also about cohesion and solidarity. We cannot have a single market without this guarantee of solidarity and cohesion. That was why we all delegated to Europe the national independence that we had prior to joining this project.

Jan Andersson, *rapporteur*. – (SV) Madam President, the crisis is now beginning to become a reality for people, unemployment is starting to rise, and it is rising rapidly, and we are starting to see the social consequences of the crisis. The downturn is becoming larger than we thought at the start. There will be higher unemployment and greater social consequences.

I would like to say something to the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats here in Parliament. Mr Hökmark is not here, but he blamed this crisis on the proposal by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. This is like shooting the pianist if you do not like the song. We do, of course, have governments of the centre and of the right in Europe. It is these governments that are failing to act, these governments that are demonstrating a lack of coordination and a lack of solidarity.

Now it is a matter of jobs, of the social security systems and of the public sector. I say to the Commission and the Council prior to the summit: we need to act now, we need to act in a coordinated way, we need to make sufficient efforts and we need to do so with solidarity. It is now that we need to do this. We cannot wait until the summit in May. The employment issues must be top of the agenda right now.

(Applause)

Evgeni Kirilov, *rapporteur*. – (BG) Thank you, Madam President. The Cohesion Policy has demonstrated its contribution to overcoming social and economic problems and implementing structural reforms in Member States and their regions. The experience acquired so far and the significant resources earmarked, we are talking about more than EUR 340 billion over a 7-year period, are a vital necessity during the current economic crisis, and it is of paramount importance that this money is actually used, in the best way possible at that, for the benefit of European citizens and business. At a time when every single euro matters to the European

economy's recovery, we cannot allow these funds to be spent in the wrong way. This is why we also welcome the simplification of the rules and we call for them to be properly implemented.

Mr Verheugen, when you spoke today, you said something which is true: we do not know how long the crisis will last. However, there is one thing we should say today: the decisions which we make and, obviously, the decisions which the European Council takes next week, must produce results this year. I would even say that these results must be achieved by this summer. This is what European citizens are expecting from us so that they can see the light at the end of the tunnel and hope of a way out of this crisis, and quickly at that.

I would like to make a comment aimed at the few fellow Members who tried today to impose an economic dividing line between old and new Member States. I believe that this very Cohesion Policy, which we will make a decision on today, runs counter to these ideas they are proposing. This all seems to me to be extremely damaging and we must join efforts to overcome it. Thank you.

President. – I have received five motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today, Wednesday 11 March.

Written statements (Rule 142)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), in writing. – Guidelines were adopted as part of the renewed Lisbon Strategy in 2008 and shall remain valid until 2010. All Member States, including Malta, had to set out their strategies to deliver growth in jobs. Employment guidelines were set out. Financing the same is essential and the European Social Fund can finance immediate actions to be taken by Member States with regard to both flexicurity and skills.

Flexicurity is an integrated policy approach that seeks to facilitate adaptability of workers and enterprises. Secondly, we have to make a massive effort in improving the level of skills. This improvement has to take place at all levels of qualifications.

Firstly, the improvement in skill levels will be useless unless it matches the needs of a labour market.

Secondly, priority has to be given to three strategies:

- improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises;
- attracting more people into employment and retaining more people in employment so as to increase the labour supply and to make social protection systems workable;
- increasing investments in human capital through enhanced skills and better education.

Adam Bielan (UEN), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, while listening to this debate, I could not help feeling that there is an atmosphere of competition in the Chamber, a kind of tug of war – the old Member States against the new. It seems to me that blaming and pointing the finger at each other about who deserves to be in the EU is not a panacea for our problems.

Above all, let us remember that the citizens are listening to us, and they expect protection from us. It is precisely now that they want to see what the united Europe is for. We should use this debate as an opportunity to think about how to limit the social effects of the present crisis.

We say 'yes' to the Lisbon Strategy because it brings results – it is thanks to the Lisbon Strategy that almost 7 million new jobs have been created in the EU. What kind of jobs are they, however? Very often, they involve temporary or part-time work and, in fact, the employment rate remains unchanged in terms of full-time jobs.

This simply proves that Europe has to learn to use its potential. We should invest in high-technology products which need highly qualified workers – this is our added value, a sector in which we are unrivalled. In this regard, extending the periods for benefiting from financial resources and simplifying the application procedures, especially for the new Member States, are extremely important.

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The global economic crisis has taken us all by surprise, whether we are talking about banks, multinational companies or even transnational institutional structures. The global economy is badly affected, and the survival of the global financial system is actually at stake. I do not think anyone will contradict me when I say that the magnitude of the current problems requires a concentrated effort at European level. Indeed, solidarity is an absolute must to get through this crisis.

I represent Romania in the European Parliament, a country in south-eastern Europe. All I can say is that the impact of economic growth of more than 7% in 2008 seems about to vanish in the face of the turbulent economic conditions which are starting to hit hard. The economic recovery plan drawn up by the European Commission must have an impact in every corner of the old continent. Certain parts of Europe must not feel abandoned and helpless against a hostile situation which they have not provoked.

I think that this is the most important test for the European Union, the boldest political project over the last few hundred years. The countries on this entire continent must show that they are a single force. According to José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission, Europe will be judged primarily by its results. I totally concur with this statement.

Cristian Silviu Bușoi (ALDE), in writing. – (RO) I believe that the initiative proposing an economic recovery plan during the current crisis is welcome. The EU needs to adopt a common, clear and effective approach so as to minimise the effects of the crisis as much as possible in terms of its intensity and duration.

We need clearer regulations for the financial sector, especially with regard to investments involving a high degree of risk, such as hedge funds.

At present, solidarity between Member States is of paramount importance. It goes without saying that Member States will adopt measures specific to their national context, but they must not run contrary to the internal market and EMU. The priority must be to facilitate credit, especially for SMEs, which are a driving force for economic growth and have the ability to create jobs. Intervention measures by the state must, however, be temporary, after which competition regulations must be strictly complied with.

In addition, measures to combat the crisis must be integrated as part of a responsible budgetary policy. Although we are going through a crisis, I feel that it is particularly important to adhere, as far as possible, to the Stability and Growth Pact, since increasing the budget deficit may be a disastrous solution in the long term, especially for future generations.

Daniel Dăianu (ALDE), in writing. – Commissioner Joaquín Almunia has said recently that member countries of the eurozone which are confronted with substantial difficulties could benefit from assistance from other EU members. Why has this indication of collective response not been firmly signalled to non-eurozone new Member States? Arguably, there is something wrong with the assistance packages extended to Latvia and Hungary. Reducing very large imbalances is, fundamentally, sound. But how this is done does matter to the utmost. Are budget deficits to be compressed drastically while the private sector is cutting its activity dramatically? Pro-cyclicality has to be averted both during an upswing and a downswing. If public budgets are not the main explanation behind large external deficits, why should they bear the brunt of downsizing them? Just remember the lessons from the Asian crisis a decade ago. Policy also has to think about how to discourage speculative attacks against the currencies of new Member States. Just cutting budget deficits drastically would not help much in this regard either. Hopefully, future Ecofin meetings would enhance better approaches regarding financial assistance. And, whenever the IMF is brought on board in assistance packages, it should consider the suitability of its traditional approach in dealing with macroeconomic imbalances in view of the extraordinary current circumstances.

Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă (PSE), in writing. – (RO) Romania must make use of the new opportunities provided by the Structural Funds.

Central and local public authorities in Romania must capitalise as quickly and effectively as possible on the opportunity offered by the European Commission in terms of facilitating access to the Community's Structural Funds. They must access these funds in order to create new jobs, offer professional training through life-long learning programmes with a view to professional retraining, as well as provide support for SMEs.

Speeding up and simplifying the distribution of Community finances may help the economic recovery, thanks to an injection of cash into the targeted areas. These payments will be quicker and more flexible and there will only be a single payment, which will enable the required projects to be implemented in a short time in areas such as infrastructure, energy or the environment.

On the other hand, the Romanian authorities must provide, in keeping with EU procedures, the cofinancing portion for implementing the projects so that they can be implemented as quickly as possible once the EU money has been received.

The European executive's proposals are aimed at a series of measures for accelerating priority investments at national and regional level in Member States, while also simplifying access to grants and increasing the financial resources available to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Dragoş Florin David (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The main features common to European Union Member States are democracy, stability, accountability and cohesion. Evgeni Kirilov's report on the Cohesion Policy and investments in the real economy underlines the importance of these features common to Member States as a first requirement in the common strategy for pursuing social and economic policies. The European economy is suffering nowadays as a result of the consequences of the global financial crisis and of the most far-reaching and serious recession in the last 60 years. We must encourage Member States to look at opportunities for synergy between funding from the Cohesion Policy and other Community sources of funding, such as TEN-T, TEN-E, the Seventh Framework Programme for research and technological development, the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme, as well as the funding granted by the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. At the same time, Member States must simplify and facilitate access to finances offered through the financial instruments JESSICA, JASMINE and JEREMIE to encourage SMEs and relevant beneficiaries to use them more frequently. I would like to conclude by congratulating the rapporteur, Mr Kirilov, for his contribution in compiling this report.

Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (GA) We are living in a period of economic uncertainty. The European Union has a responsibility to see if it is possible to allow national and regional authorities flexibility so that better ownership can be taken of EU funds to deal with the unprecedented situation.

The measures in Commissioner Huebner's plan *Cohesion Policy: Investing in the real economy* are practical and they are measures which should be adopted by domestic authorities without delay.

The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can now be used to provide partial funding for ecological investment in low-income housing, something that should be used to create and maintain jobs in the building industry – which is very hard hit – and that would help us to get closer to fulfilling our climate commitments at the same time.

Acknowledgment payments from the European Social Fund could really stimulate the struggling public sectors and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) should benefit from the recommended changes to make cash flow more easily available.

This is a step in the right direction. I find some of the language in Kirilov's report in relation to the Lisbon strategy regrettable.

Adam Gierek (PSE), in writing. – (PL) How can we combat the financial crisis? (European Economic Recovery Plan) The financial crisis can be tackled in the short-term or the long-term. The short-term method is based on the elimination of diseases which have developed in recent decades and which lead to loss of liquidity by banks, the circulation of 'infected' bonds and a lack of coherence of financial policy with actual overall policy.

Countries which help banks financially are not eliminating the causes of the crisis. The fundamental cause of the crisis is, in my opinion, the neoliberal mechanism at work in the economy, that is to say, its orientation to short-term profit while ignoring long-term interest, to name but one feature.

The long-term method should, therefore, correct the mechanism governing the operation of the economy by breaking with the dogmas of the so-called free market. Member States and the European Commission should not take the place of competitively sound market mechanisms, but they do have an obligation to prevent diseases. This means that, firstly, short-term profit should not obscure the long-term interests which result from the development of infrastructure, construction of public buildings, protection of the natural environment or the search for new, and sometimes less profitable, sources of energy, for example.

Secondly, all forms of ownership should be treated equally, and choice of one or another should be based on the effectiveness of management of each form.

Thirdly, Member States and the European Commission should assume the function of coordinator of the areas of both financial policy and overall policy.

Fourthly, Member States and the European Commission should develop methods for coordinating the international currency and financial market, which is vulnerable to speculation because it acts spontaneously.

Genowefa Grabowska (PSE), in writing. – (PL) The economic crisis has now reached Europe. First, it affected developed economies, then it spread to developing and emerging economies. The latest forecasts for 2009 predict economic growth at a level of –1% or lower. We find ourselves, therefore, in one of the most serious recessions ever to affect the European Community.

I agree with the rapporteur that individual measures taken by countries are now not enough, even if they are supported by transfers of capital to the sectors most endangered by the crisis. Our economies are integrated with each other, and the crisis is a global one, and this is why the recovery measures proposed must also constitute a response which is global in character and extent. In addition, they must enshrine the fundamental principle of the EU, namely the principle of solidarity. Only this will allow us to retain territorial and social cohesion within the EU. I think that at such a time of crisis, the principle of solidarity is also gaining a new political dimension.

Furthermore, I endorse the concern expressed in the report for ordinary people caught up in the crisis. We must make loans available once again to families and firms and, most of all, to SMEs, which are the cornerstone of the European economy. Only such an objective, together with protection of citizens' savings, justifies the use of public funds for a rescue plan. If, as part of the European rescue plan, we could also manage to put an end to tax havens, the fight against the crisis would surely be easier and more effective.

Louis Grech (PSE), in writing. – As the financial crisis is deepening with no end in sight, I think that more funds will be necessary in order to stabilise the European economy and stop the downward spiral. Other bottlenecks include the spiralling rate of unemployment and enormous insecurity in the labour market. Non availability of credit, together with the increase in the public deficit, is still a major problem and is a key factor if we really want to successfully and effectively tackle economic recession. It is very important that adequate credit supply is re-established and that money should be used as an economic stimulus i.e. to flow to families and companies. It is necessary to create incentives to attract capital investment. Unfortunately, at the moment, there is no European mechanism or institution capable of coordinating an integrated continental recovery and therefore we are reapplying patchwork solutions that may fail as a whole, since Member States' economies are highly interdependent. The European recovery efforts must go hand in hand with regulatory changes to avoid repeating the mistakes that brought us into the crisis. Lack of regulation and poor supervision have been at the root of the problem and we need to re-establish effective regulations.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We will only be able to understand the serious socio-economic situation affecting the countries of the EU, including Portugal, if we bear in mind the objectives of this 'integration process' and how its policies are at the root of the current capitalist crisis, of which the EU is one of the epicentres.

In the last 23 years, the EEC/EU has promoted the circulation of capital and the financialisation of the economy; it has liberalised markets and encouraged privatisation; it has merged companies and encouraged over-production; it has relocated and destroyed productive capacity; it has promoted the economic mastery of some, at the cost of the dependence of others; it has encouraged worker exploitation and the increasing transfer of labour productivity gains to capital; it has centralised the wealth created; and it has increased social inequalities and regional asymmetries, all under the control of the major powers and the large economic and financial groups. These are the root causes of the irreparable capitalist crisis.

It is not the 'crisis', but the policies inherent in capitalism which are at the root of unemployment, insecurity, low wages, worsening living conditions, poverty, disease, hunger and the growing difficulties faced by workers and the general population.

We therefore welcome the huge demonstration planned by the CGTP-IN, the general confederation of Portuguese workers, for 13 March, in order to change course towards more jobs, more wages and more rights.

Gábor Harangozó (PSE), in writing. – The Union needs to maximise its efforts to implement a consistent framework to tackle the global financial crisis. If we want to restore public confidence and a sound financial system, we ought to act rapidly to sustain employment and economic activity. To alleviate the negative effects of recession, maintaining social standards and employment levels, some adjustments should be made to simplify access to available resources while ensuring more transparency and better management. The last EIT Council conclusions called for 'rapid additional action by the ESF to support employment, especially for

the most vulnerable groups in the population, paying particular attention to the smallest undertakings by reducing non-wage labour costs'. I would therefore like to ask the next Council Summit to seriously consider the creation and retention of jobs through co-financing measures related to reducing non-wage labour costs, on a temporary basis, in countries seriously affected by financial or economic downturn. The utmost attention should indeed be given to the most vulnerable groups in the population, those who suffer the most from the consequences of the economic and social downturn, to avoid further asymmetric impact of the crisis which jeopardises the balanced development of all territories within the Union.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE), in writing. – Solidarity is one of the most precious values for Europe today. Yet in the current economic crisis, there are signs that European solidarity is being undermined.

More than ever we have to avoid divisions between Member States – to avoid categorisation of old and new, big and small. The division which exists between euro and non-eurozone Member States must not give the eurozone states a privileged position from which to dictate the common future. All Member States need to be involved equally in decision making. All Member States have to be guaranteed the right to communicate their problems and concerns in order to find possible European solutions.

Europe needs a driving force to overcome the economic crisis with the least amount of damage. Protectionism cannot be the answer to the economic crisis. On the contrary, openness and the spirit of competition need to remain the basis of our activities. Therefore, to take advantage of the current depression, more money should be invested in innovation, research and development.

In other words, the crisis should be seen as an incentive to implement the Lisbon strategy. Only by using fully this strategy based on solidarity can we ensure jobs and the sustainability of the European economy.

Magda Kósáné Kovács (PSE), in writing. – (HU) It is not worth trying to rank grievances. However, the mutually felt pain mobilises resources and intentions. Many evoke the crisis of 1929, although the Second World War that followed in its wake divided Europe between two different paths. The countries of the former Eastern bloc, moreover, experienced the change of regime as a trauma as well, but in this case, we are all equally threatened by the global financial and economic crisis which, in spite of certain early signs, was nonetheless unexpected.

From the moment of the crisis, Europe's path can no longer diverge, even into several parallel paths – there cannot be two speeds. In the devaluation of speculative capital, everyone stands to lose; only the degree of the loss differs. The paradigm of the common market can only survive and remain competitive in such a situation if we provide joint, coordinated solutions. The ghost of protectionism does not offer good advice!

The task of the Member States is to work out their financial plans in collaboration with each other. The European Union can supplement this task by assessing how each can give support according to its means, to ensure that the Member States and citizens who are further back in the queue also end up with a positive balance. The Central and Eastern European region is further back in this queue, partly for historical reasons, partly because the lack of the euro has caused a lack of confidence and turned speculative capital against us. And although it is impossible to treat certain Member States on an equal footing, I firmly state that we need to work out a system of support at European level that makes it possible, in the name of solidarity, to offer assistance that is appropriate to each Member State.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) All the principles in the European Economic Recovery Plan must feature in national economic recovery plans.

The EU funds made available must be used for top priority projects and be distributed fairly among Member States, taking into account, however, any special cases.

We must make effective use of every opportunity available to us. This is why bringing forward the opportunities to use EU funds is of paramount importance because it will speed up and ensure flexibility in implementing this plan.

The projects must be implemented quickly and efficiently in order to pick up the section of the labour force going through difficult times. This is why the administrative procedures, especially the timeframes for applying the procedures, must be radically reduced to guarantee the immediate effectiveness of this process.

In addition, among the measures which need to be adopted, those concerning the adoption of a legislative framework to effectively combat tax havens are an absolute must.

It is obvious that state aid must be used prudently to avoid creating problems with competition. At the same time, however, we must closely analyse the beneficial effects which aid like this can have with regard to using labour, bearing in mind the situations where this aid is more than necessary.

Iosif Matula (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The European Commission allocates significant sums for investments in energy efficiency, in producing renewable energy, as well as in the construction of Trans-European transport and energy networks. We can only ensure that the gas and energy crisis situations which occurred in certain regions of the EU will not happen again in future by implementing a sound policy in this area.

Connecting up all the gas and energy networks in Europe ensures that the principle of solidarity is applied: a Member State will be able to import, or even export, natural resources in normal conditions, even during a crisis.

In this context, Member States must use the funding opportunities offered by the Structural Funds to develop projects in areas such as infrastructure, energy and the environment.

To improve the quality of these projects and the effective impact of their implementation, EU Member States must avail themselves of the maximum technical assistance which the European Commission can offer.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the speed which the EU institutions have shown in identifying some solutions to the current economic crisis. However, I would like to highlight a few aspects which require closer attention.

Firstly, the funding for energy infrastructure projects. I believe that it is fundamentally the wrong approach to distribute money to as many projects as possible as there is the risk of not being able to cover the budget required to complete them. Recently, following the discussions about Nabucco, I get the impression that we are playing with fire. We cannot announce EUR 250 million for Nabucco, then say that we are cutting funding by EUR 50 million, and finally conclude that this should actually be a purely private investment. The benefit of the Nabucco project is indisputable and we cannot afford to procrastinate on this for political and economic reasons.

Secondly, I believe that we must avoid falling prey to protectionist tendencies, which would affect the operation of the internal market. Even though this crisis is having an uneven impact throughout the EU, we must provide a single response to it, in accordance with the objectives of the Cohesion Policy and the principles of the internal market. I think that it is absolutely necessary to evaluate the impact of these amendments in order to improve the efficiency of the measures in the new 2014-2020 financial framework.

Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) Accounting for a third of the EU budget without being a crisis management instrument, the Cohesion Policy is, however, the largest source of investment in the real economy, offering a huge opportunity, especially for permanently disadvantaged regions. Consequently, I would like to draw attention to the need to find solutions ensuring a better vertical involvement of regions at European level.

In the conditions created by the current extraordinary economic situation, I would like to emphasise the importance of improving flexibility in terms of accessing the Structural Funds. I also welcome extending the opportunity of support to investments in energy efficiency and renewable energies in the housing and clean technology sectors.

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FI) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, last week, the Commission submitted its communication on the economic crisis to the Council for its meeting at the end of this month. The Commission also gave its first assessment of the results of the European economic stimulus package. The Commission considers the initial results to be good and estimates that recovery action at national and European levels together will have an overall value equivalent to around 3.3% of GDP in the period 2009-2010.

I congratulate the rapporteur on a very creditable report. In my opinion, the need to coordinate action by the Member States, which it emphasises, is particularly important. The emergence of tendencies is very worrying. Member States might make assurances in speeches that they are ready to pull together, but something quite different is evident where the action taken is concerned. It is extremely important that EU leaders take decisions with reference to what they say and do not give in to protectionist pressures which, in several countries, are unquestionably drastic.

The EU needs to take a new, ambitious step that constitutes a continuation of the Lisbon Strategy. The EU needs a stimulus package that gives support to new industries as a basis for competitiveness and growth. With investment in such areas as eco-modernisation, renewable energy sources and information technology, it is possible to establish healthy sectoral change.

A crisis is also an opportunity. It is an opportunity to reorganise the whole pan-European and global financial architecture. The crisis is also an opportunity to steer economic growth along an entirely new avenue, based on renewable energy sources and energy efficiency. The 'New Green Deal', as it is known, must be a basis for recovery and new growth. Thus, as we create jobs and introduce innovation, we will also be addressing the challenges of climate change.

Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SK) The European economy is suffering the effects of the global financial crisis, seeing the greatest and most serious decline in the last 60 years. The crisis is an enormous test for Europe. It affects companies and, at the same time, ordinary people and their families. Many are living in fear, particularly of losing their jobs, and are looking to the EU to save them.

Europe cannot just be the sum of 27 national interests. It must be based on solidarity and the willingness of Member States and regions to implement their programme objectives as quickly as possible.

At a time of economic crisis, it should be clear to us that we must concentrate on the Lisbon objectives, particularly in the area of employment. It is cohesion policy that has the financial instruments which must be applied intensively and flexibly during the crisis. The financial resources of EU Cohesion Policy for the period 2007-2013 can significantly help to fulfil the objectives of the EU's renewed Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment, which brings together ordinary people, companies, infrastructure, the energy sector and research and innovation. We need to improve coordination and to abandon protectionism and all forms of demagoguery. We must restart capital flows and capital transfers.

I firmly believe that investments in innovation, new technologies and eco-innovations will bring the new opportunities which are essential for securing an effective response to the current financial crisis. We must eliminate all barriers and create a genuine internal market in renewable energy.

Katrin Saks (PSE), in writing. – (ET) I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Ferreira, for a relevant and timely report. In the present crisis conditions, it is crucial that existing funds be fully utilised. It is regrettable that the majority of Member States that are entitled to receive support from the Structural and Cohesion Funds in the new financial perspective have been unable to utilise those funds. The same applies in my homeland, Estonia. There are several reasons for this: the first major problem is Member States' own administrative capacity; in this area, Member States could do a great deal themselves and they could improve administrative functioning. A second reason originates from the European Union. It is important that the EU should make conditions more flexible. There is a problem, for instance, with those programmes where expenditure must be made in advance, and which are then financed afterwards. It is now difficult to get loans to make those expenditures. The question of what action the European Commission plans to take regarding advance payments is very important. The next important matter is the rate of self-financing under present conditions; in this area, greater flexibility should be considered. The third important matter is the supervisory mechanism – the present bureaucracy is clearly unwieldy.

Thank you for the report.

Theodor Dumitru Stolojan (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) In the case of some Member States, including the Baltic States, Romania or Hungary, the financial crisis and global recession have highlighted structural imbalances which have accumulated during the periods of economic growth, based on inflows of direct foreign investments and external debt at rapid rates.

Any EU economic recovery plan must take into account that these countries need considerable external financing to be able to cover the deficit in the trade in goods and services. Failing this external financing, the countries in question are destined for huge, abrupt adjustments which will wipe out the welfare benefits acquired during previous years, will weaken cohesion within the EU, and may even jeopardise stability in the area.

The Council and European Commission have a definite responsibility to find solutions to produce the external financing that is required. The Member States in question have the responsibility, by gaining time through the external financing obtained, to carry out the structural reforms which will correct the accumulated imbalances.

Margie Sudre (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) Regional policy is the primary source of European investment in the real economy. Speeding up and simplifying its financing can help the economic recovery by releasing liquidity into targeted sectors.

The faster, more flexible payments, at flat rates and in lump sums, proposed by the Commission, will allow the immediate implementation of projects in the areas of infrastructure, energy and the environment.

National and regional authorities must take advantage of these opportunities and make intensive use of the Structural Funds in order to boost employment, SMEs, the spirit of enterprise and work-related training, whilst making their contribution under the cofinancing rules, so that the allocated funds can be utilised in full.

I call on the regional councils and the prefectures in the French overseas departments, as Structural Fund management authorities, to anticipate these changes so that their regional programmes can be focused immediately on projects showing the best potential for growth and jobs.

In the face of the current unrest in the French overseas departments, and with the protest movement now affecting Réunion, we must explore new indigenous development initiatives and activate all the levers at our disposal, including those provided by the European Union.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The EU Communication on the European Economic Recovery Plan in December 2008 lists the areas in which the EU will be investing over the next few years in order to ensure economic growth and preserve jobs. These are: support for small and medium-sized enterprises, with a financial estimate of EUR 30 billion via the EIB; accelerating investments in infrastructure projects for Trans-European energy and broadband interconnections, with a financial estimate of EUR 5 billion for improving energy efficiency in buildings; research and innovation.

These measures must be supported by legislative proposals which also guarantee the financial allocations. The proposal for a regulation from January 2009 for financing energy projects as part of the European Economic Recovery Plan does not contain financial allocations for energy efficiency in buildings. I believe that the EU is wrong if, during this economic crisis, it fails to back priority projects financially. Energy efficiency in buildings is an area which can generate roughly 500 000 jobs in the EU, improve citizens' quality of life, and contribute to sustainable economic development by promoting renewable energy sources. I personally feel that it would be a failure on the part of the current European Commission if it is not going to support making buildings more energy efficient through the use of financial measures and instruments, suitable fiscal measures and through giving a strong political signal at European level.

Andrzej Tomasz Zapałowski (UEN), in writing. – (PL) Madam President, today we are debating a plan to revive the economy in relation to the priorities of the Lisbon Strategy. Although several years have passed since the Strategy was announced, we can see that it is not being put into effect. In other words we produce documents which we do not then implement. This is confirmed by a certain custom, which has become the norm in this Parliament, namely snowing citizens under with regulations which, in many cases, make their lives difficult and which do not have a significant effect on their standard of living.

In addition, the growing financial crisis shows that the European Commission and the Council are completely detached from the everyday problems of society. Essentially, the Commission has no genuine plan of action in response to the growing crisis. Everyone can see that individual countries are undertaking rescue measures on their own, and that the centrally managed market worth five hundred million is not capable of having a real effect on the scale of the crisis.

In recent years, the countries of Eastern Europe have been told that they should privatise their banks, in other words, that they should subordinate them to Western European banks. This they naively did, and today it is those very banks which are speculating and killing off the economies of the new Member States of the EU.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE*Vice-President***4. Agenda**

President. – As regards the draft resolution by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka, I have received a written objection to the inclusion of the said draft resolution from Robert Evans and 40 other signatories.

In accordance with the provisions of Rule 90(4) of the Rules of Procedure, the draft resolution is included for debate and vote on the agenda of the current session.

I therefore propose to you that the debate this evening be included as the last item, and the vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon. The deadline for tabling amendments is 3 p.m. this afternoon.

Robert Evans (PSE). – Madam President, on Monday evening, the Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted a motion regarding the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka, pursuant to Rule 91.

The situation in Sri Lanka is clearly very serious, but exactly what is happening regarding the humanitarian situation is far from clear. I am conscious that there are many differing views across this House. So I suggest that the most sensible course of action would be to timetable a proper debate, which cannot seriously be fitted in in this part-session but could be in our next part-session, which is just 10 days away. I am grateful to Mr Daul of the PPE-DE Group for indicating his group's support for this course of action. As we are a serious Chamber, I suggest and ask colleagues to support a debate with resolution and full participation at the next part-session, to do justice to the gravity of the situation in Sri Lanka.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Verts/ALE). – *(FR)* Madam President, when someone proposes something, someone may always speak against it prior to the vote.

I therefore wish merely to say that the situation in Sri Lanka is extremely tragic. There are 150 000 people trapped with no way out. This is exactly the same as in Burma. This is why Sri Lanka should be left on the agenda today, to show our determination to support those who are trapped.

(Parliament rejected the request to postpone the debate)

5. Voting time

President. – The next item is voting time.

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

5.1. VAT exemption on the final importation of certain goods (A6-0060/2009, Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg) (vote)

5.2. Europol staff: adjustment of basic salaries and allowances (A6-0078/2009, Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra) (vote)

5.3. Mobilisation of the EU Solidarity Fund (A6-0106/2009, Reimer Böge) (vote)

5.4. Amending budget 1/2009: floods in Romania (A6-0113/2009, Jutta Haug) (vote)

5.5. Common rules and standards for ship inspection and survey organisations and for the relevant activities of maritime administrations (recast) (A6-0097/2009, Luis de Grandes Pascual) (vote)

5.6. Common rules and standards for ship inspection and survey organisations (recast) (A6-0098/2009, Luis de Grandes Pascual) (vote)

5.7. Port State control (recast) (A6-0099/2009, Dominique Vlasto) (vote)

5.8. Community vessel traffic monitoring and information system (A6-0100/2009, Dirk Sterckx) (vote)

5.9. Investigation of accidents in the maritime transport sector (A6-0101/2009, Jaromír Kohlíček) (vote)

5.10. The liability of carriers of passengers by sea in the event of accidents (A6-0102/2009, Paolo Costa) (vote)

5.11. Civil liability and financial guarantees of shipowners (A6-0072/2009, Gilles Savary) (vote)

5.12. Compliance with flag State requirements (A6-0069/2009, Emanuel Jardim Fernandes) (vote)

5.13. The charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures (A6-0066/2009, Saïd El Khadraoui) (vote)

5.14. Public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (A6-0077/2009, Michael Cashman) (vote)

– *Before the final vote:*

Michael Cashman, *rapporteur*. – Madam President, under Rule 53, I would like to ask the Commission to respond and tell us whether it intends to adopt all of Parliament's amendments as adopted today.

Günter Verheugen, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – Madam President, I have the honour of giving the following declaration on behalf of the Commission.

The Commission takes note of the amendments voted by Parliament that it will study in detail. The Commission confirms its willingness to seek a compromise with Parliament and Council. The Commission will only consider its proposal after the two branches of the budgetary authority have adopted their positions. The Commission intends to continue to pursue a constructive dialogue, in the meantime, with both institutions.

Michael Cashman, *rapporteur*. – Madam President, I do not know where the Commissioner has been, but we adopted a position this morning.

I would therefore like to request that the plenary vote to refer the report back to committee, which would give the committee the flexibility to enter into negotiations with both the Council and the Commission.

I therefore ask for the House's support for a referral back to committee.

(Parliament approved the request to postpone the final vote)

Michael Cashman, *rapporteur*. – Madam President, my thanks to the House for its patience on this, my final intervention. Can I now ask you, Madam President, to write a formal invitation to the Czech Presidency, as well as the incoming Swedish Presidency, to open a formal dialogue with the European Parliament as soon as possible?

Equally, as announced in the voting list and for the sake of clarity and coherence of the text that we have now adopted, I kindly ask that you request the plenary services to proceed, without any substantive change, to do the following: to group the articles according to their content under specific thematic titles, to re-order recitals and definitions accordingly and to produce and publish Parliament's position as a consolidated text as soon as possible.

Finally, may I pay due thanks to the enormous and supportive work which I have been given not only by the secretariats, but by the tabling services.

(Applause)

President. – I will pass on this request, then, Mr Cashman, and the results will be made known.

5.15. Guidelines for the Member States' employment policies (A6-0052/2009, Jan Andersson) (vote)

5.16. Extending the applicability of Rule 139 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure until the end of the seventh parliamentary term (B6-0094/2009) (vote)

5.17. The social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU (A6-0038/2009, Magda Kósáné Kovács) (vote)

5.18. Facing oil challenges (A6-0035/2009, Herbert Reul) (vote)

5.19. Greening of transport and internalisation of external costs (A6-0055/2009, Georg Jarzembowski) (vote)

5.20. Lisbon Strategy (vote)

– Before the vote on Amendment 28 (concerns the vote on Amendment 27):

Pervenche Berès (PSE). – *(FR)* Madam President, I may be mistaken but I think that you have held a vote on Amendment 27 which, in reality, was a technical amendment that simply asked for paragraph 47 to be moved. On the other hand, there is a request for a separate roll-call vote on the original text.

I therefore believe that we have agreed to move paragraph 47, and we now need a two-part roll-call vote on paragraph 47 itself.

President. – Let us clarify matters: there was no objection to paragraph 47 being inserted after paragraph 49. We then voted on Amendment 27, which has been adopted. We could not therefore vote on paragraph 47, as we have voted on Amendment 27. There is therefore no problem.

5.21. Combating climate change (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 20:

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Madam President, a very brief amendment to the original text. Paragraph 20, line 3 should read: 'reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation'. At the moment, it reads 'reducing emissions for deforestation and degradation'. I want to change the word 'for' to 'from'. In the English version it is wrong. This is not contentious.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

5.22. Employment policy guidelines (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 13:

Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE). – Madam President, this is a very simple amendment, just to change 'the disabled' to either 'people with disabilities' or 'disabled people'. We never use the words 'the disabled' in English.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on Amendment 1:

Philip Bushill-Matthews (PPE-DE). – Madam President, this, again, is a fairly standard amendment with reference to the role of these consultations of the social partners. It just adds, at the end, the phrase: ‘in accordance with national custom and practice’. This is normally built into an amendment, but for some reason it got left out. The Socialists are supportive of this amendment, and hopefully the other groups will be too; they usually are.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

5.23. European Economic Recovery Plan (A6-0063/2009, Elisa Ferreira) (vote)

– Before the vote:

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I would like to inform our group that there is a mistake in our voting lists regarding Amendment 113: there should be a plus in the voting list, and not a minus.

– Before the vote on Amendment 93:

Elisa Ferreira, rapporteur. – Madam President, it is just to change the wording in Paragraph 93 concerning sound state finance to ‘as soon as possible’, instead of ‘when economic conditions allow’, as agreed with the shadow rapporteurs.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on Amendment 71:

Alain Lipietz (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, this is a purely technical amendment. There is a misprint in our amendment. There is an indent that was worded as follows: ‘intensify the elimination of barriers’. We have replaced this with ‘remove unjustified barriers’, but, unfortunately, the old paragraph, the old indent has remained in the wording of the amendment. It is therefore the third indent that we have amended slightly, and there is no need to keep the old version.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on the draft resolution:

Martin Schulz (PSE). – (DE) Madam President, you can tell by the enthusiastic response from the Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats to my intervention how well things went during our vote.

I would like to thank my colleague Mrs Ferreira who has done a huge amount of work in order to bring about this result. I would also like to thank specifically Mr Hökmark, Mrs Herczog, Mr Bullmann and Mr Lehne, who have, in my opinion, worked very hard on the similar Lisbon resolution.

However, you can see from the reaction of the PPE-DE group that there was a mood of excitement. We would like to thank you for voting with us on the closure of tax havens and on solidarity with the Member States. Until a few minutes ago, things looked quite different. It is to your credit that you have encouraged the spread of social democracy. This is good for the European Parliament, which has moved to the left.

(Applause from the left and protests from the right)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, I would just like to remind the Socialist Group in the European Parliament and the Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats that there are groups in this Parliament other than the two large ones.

Hartmut Nassauer (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, one item relating to the agenda. Perhaps you could explain to the House under which rule in the Rules of Procedure Mr Schulz was permitted to take the floor.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I am, of course, going to tell Mr Nassauer that he is quite correct. Sometimes, however, for democracy’s sake, one has to be able to cross the lines a little.

I mean by this, ladies and gentlemen, that I gave the floor to Mr Schulz in accordance with Rule 141 of the Rules of Procedure. He was perfectly entitled to speak.

Joseph Daul (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, did he speak on behalf of the Commission? Because he wants to become a Commissioner? Or did he speak as the Chairman of the group?

– *After the final vote:*

Vittorio Prodi (ALDE). – (IT) Madam President, I would like some clarification. As far as I know, the final vote has not been taken on the Reul report. Can you confirm if this correct?

President. – Mr Prodi, we have adopted Amendment 3, which therefore replaces the whole resolution.

5.24. Cohesion Policy: investing in the real economy (A6-0075/2009, Evgeni Kirilov) (vote)

6. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

- Report: Elisa Ferreira (A6-0063/2009)

Richard Corbett (PSE). – Madam President, I welcome the fact that this report looks at what can be done at European level to stimulate the economies, whilst I recognise that most of the instruments to do so remain at national level: 99% of public expenditure is national, not European; most regulation is national, not European. But if we look at what we can do at European level, the plan proposed by the Commission for a EUR 30 billion contribution, including advance payments from Structural Funds and new loans from the European Investment Bank, can and will make a real contribution to coming out of this crisis.

We must also make sure that we avoid protectionism in Europe. A beggar-your-neighbour approach by different countries would weaken our common market and seriously damage the prospects of job creation and economic growth in the long term. On the contrary, freedom of movement for workers and initiatives to help businesses' exports to the single market will help provide the stimulus needed for our economic recovery.

- Report: Paolo Costa (A6-0102/2009)

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) Madam President, I voted in favour of the joint text on improving safety for those who choose to travel by sea. I think it is very important to add that more should be spent on the professionalism of all seamen responsible for navigation – from the captain, to the chief engineer, to the boatswain, to the master-at-arms, to the helmsman and to all seamen – because the lives and safety of men at sea depends on them. I therefore call for more professionalism and better salaries for those who hold the lives of maritime passengers in their hands.

- Report: Saïd El Khadraoui (A6-0066/2009)

Simon Busuttil (PPE-DE), – (MT) On this report I would like to say that despite its initiative in favour of the environment, there was still a lack of consideration regarding the negative and disproportionate effects that it would have on the regions and countries that are situated on the periphery of the European Union, as Malta is. This initiative could potentially bring about a substantial price hike in the transportation of cargo for transport operating to and from these peripheral regions. This rise in costs, in turn, could lead to higher prices on the products that enter and leave these regions or countries. Therefore, I voted against this report.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, imposing additional charges on heavy goods vehicles represents an increase in taxation. Lorry transport provides a service to the whole economy, including the citizens. Its costs have an effect on the price of all the products we consume. Burdening road transport, alongside the taxes which already have to be paid, with the additional costs of excise duty on fuel and vignettes, when we are faced with the problem of a crisis to which no end is in sight is socially irresponsible.

Air pollution, the greenhouse effect and accidents are, to a large degree, dependent on the construction of vehicles and on the road system. In the last ten years, significant progress has been made in this area and we have all felt the benefits. I do not endorse the directive in its present form because it requires radical revision.

- Report: Michael Cashman (A6-0077/2009)

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, firstly I would like to say that I support this report by Mr Cashman, and I thank him for it. It improved greatly at Parliament's reading, when we consider what the Commission's original proposal was.

The basic assumption we have to make is that decision making is transparent. People must have the opportunity to have access to documents, because that is the only way to inspire confidence, and, with this in mind, it is very important that we should be able to get to a position where people can see how the legislative process progresses. Transparency must apply at each administrative level with regard to documents.

Everyone obviously understands that there are some areas, such as matters to do with a private individual's health and so on, which need to be kept private, but in the legislative process, everything should basically be transparent, and in this respect, I am happy with this result and believe that honest and open decision making are the way we will be able to gain the trust of the people.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Madam President, a recent report by the UK-based NGO, the Taxpayers' Alliance, said that EU membership costs every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom GBP 2 000 each year.

I have to say that many of my constituents in the North East of England think they get very bad value for such a large sum of money. Therefore, ensuring public access to the documents of the European institutions is the very least that those constituents could expect in return for handing over such large sums to the EU every year. In the eyes of many people, the EU remains a very obscure and monolithic entity. Anything that we can do to improve access, to give more information to the public on some of the things that perhaps some of our Commissioners and others would rather keep confidential, is very welcome.

Already we see whistleblowers and others that have been vilified and hounded out of their jobs for exposing confidential information. If all that information had been available in the first place, then perhaps many of those over-the-top reactions would have been unnecessary.

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I am grateful for this opportunity to explain how I voted on this very important report. We all know that, when different parties are involved in sensitive political negotiations, sometimes there is a need for secrecy in order to avoid a deal being scuppered. However, this is not really what we are talking about in this case.

Recently, there have been negotiations on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement and some of the issues that have been debated include a massive erosion of individual civil liberties. There have been proposals, for example, to search people's iPods and laptops when entering countries to check for copyright and non-copyright material. Were we able to debate these in an open and transparent manner? No, because these documents have been kept secret – perhaps for justifiable reasons, but reasons that we do not really understand. Therefore, what we really need is more openness and more transparency in order for us to really get to the heart of the issue.

I completely agree with my colleague, Mr Callanan, when he says that the fact that they were not transparent does not bode well for the EU.

- Report: Jan Andersson (A6-0052/2009)

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) I would like to thank those fans who have been tirelessly listening for so long. Madam President, I am one of the 74 MEPs who today voted against the Andersson report, not because I am against employment, but because these guidelines for European Union, for EU Member States policy, do not specifically state that one of the options for encouraging employment is to allow those workers to retire who want and request to do so. This policy of mandatorily raising the pension age everywhere therefore merely deprives young people of jobs when they would willingly replace those older workers who want to leave their positions to the young.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Madam President, this report starts from a false assumption: the assumption that the EU knows best when it comes to employment policy. Many of my constituents would profoundly disagree; they would rather that the EU were kept well away from anything to do with employment policy. I believe that my country should withdraw from the EU's Social Chapter.

It is more than a little ironic that the EU seeks to pass on its wisdom on employment policy to the Member States whilst, at the same time, it is responsible for huge amounts of red tape and regulation that have constricted so many businesses in my region and across Europe and caused an awful lot of the unemployment that it now seeks to cure.

The European social model is outdated, it is destructive, it prevents job creation and it acts against entrepreneurship. The best thing would be for the EU to keep its nose out of the Member States' employment policy and produce less red tape and less regulation. That is the best thing that we could do to create more jobs in the economy.

- Proposal for a decision on Rule 139 of the Rules of Procedure (B6-0094/2009)

Jim Allister (NI). – Madam President, I voted for this proposal because it postpones the folly of an utterly unnecessary waste of even more money on translation services in this House in respect of Irish.

I would have preferred the entire folly of that waste to have been overturned. However, at least this saves our taxpayers some of the unnecessary waste.

The minimal use of Irish in this Chamber is self-evident, although Miss de Brún, as part of her aggressive Republican agenda, may regale us in that dead tongue, with the only relief being that hardly anyone who tunes into Parliament on line can understand a word she says. I can assure them they are missing very little.

Her Sinn Féin colleague, Miss McDonald, has not got past uttering a little stammering, stuttering, pidgin Irish, but even then we are wasting money on translation.

- Report: Magda Kósáné Kovács (A6-0038/2009)

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I thank Ms Kovács for the informative and helpful report on the situation of the Roma.

As you all know, the population of the Roma is ever-expanding and consistently becoming a huge and influential force throughout Europe. This group of 10-12 million people is amongst the poorest on the continent, yet has immeasurable potential.

As Europeans and Members of the European Parliament, which was founded on the pillar of equality, we must react to this problem as quickly as possible. The continual oppression of one of Europe's largest minorities is shameful and inefficient. With better regulation and a higher degree of cooperation, nations may be able to provide work for this huge block of potential labourers. With the looming economic crisis, the Roma may be able to help solve some of Europe's deepest problems. In addition, the prejudice against and degradation of these people has gone on long enough. Equal rights and opportunities must be provided to all citizens of Europe, including the Roma.

Just at the beginning of this month in Hungary, two Roma people were shot like animals when they were trying to escape from their burning house. How is it possible that in a united Europe, there are cases like this?

Philip Claey's (NI). – (NL) Madam President, I have voted against the Kovács report, because this whole report is permeated with victim thinking and because I take the view that a minority group such as the Roma gypsies would actually be much better served by a strategy that would encourage them to take more responsibility for their fate.

I too, of course, share everyone's view that the Roma should be treated correctly, but most of the problems mentioned in this report are attributable to a lifestyle, a way of living, that these people have actively chosen. We can adopt as many reports and resolutions and give as much money as we like, but this will not change the situation on the ground one bit.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Madam President, in this Parliament I have heard a great deal of politically correct nonsense in my time, which was invariably approved by very large majorities, but this report takes the biscuit in my view. If this Parliament is intent on interfering in the social situation of the Roma and their access to the labour market, would it be asking too much to observe a minimum of objectivity?

The truth is that the problems of the gypsy people are largely the simple result of their own refusal to adapt to the society in which they live, certainly as far as education and vocational training are concerned. For decades, we have been pumping millions of euros into all kinds of programmes full of idyllic, but mainly

unrealistic, nonsense in the vein of this report. Without any success. Is it then not time we stopped molycoddling them and looked at the real causes of the problems before we come up with solutions?

- Report: Herbert Reul (A6-0035/2009)

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Madam President, while the amended version was an improvement, it was still with a heavy heart that I supported this own-initiative report, since it was not consistent with the climate and energy package carried by a huge majority in this House on 17 December 2008.

Just to remind us, my own EU-ETS report, which was the cornerstone of this package, was carried by 610 votes for, 60 abstentions, and 29 against. Needless to say, Mr Reul was not among the 610 Members out of 699 who supported my report.

I have reservations about any reference to drilling in the Arctic or exploration for alternative sources of oil, such as tar sands. Past months have shown that the importance of energy security has never been as acute. The cooperation that is necessary across the EU, and the need to take advantage of the stimulus packages currently launched by almost all Member States and the Commission, underscore the need for investment in renewables to increase our energy security, to decrease our carbon emissions and to wean us off our high dependence on fossil fuel, albeit over an agreed timeline.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I was the shadow rapporteur on the Sacconi report into CO₂ emissions from passenger vehicles, and I can see from the work that I did on that that we do need to reduce our dependence on oil.

We need to reduce that dependence because most oil supplies are, of course, in very unstable and unsavoury parts of the world. For far too long, our thirst for oil has sustained regimes that are deeply inimical to everything that we stand for, to our own interests and to our own values, especially with regard to human rights and good governance.

Particularly, of course, we need to reduce our dependence on Russian oil supplies. Russia has shown in the past that it will not hesitate to use its control of much of our energy supply to achieve political and economic goals, and we need to do all we can to reduce their ability to do so, and to do that we of course need to reduce our dependence on oil.

- Report: Georg Jarzembowski (A6-0055/2009)

Neena Gill (PSE). – Madam President, I abstained on this report because I believe it simply does not go far enough. We have previously made commitments in this House to reduce emissions. Transport has a key role to play in the fight against climate change and should be assisted in meeting its responsibility, but this report will do little to help.

This is unfortunate because there are some good proposals. The noise charges for trains take into account the broader environmental impact of transport and fit well with the proposals currently going through the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy on reducing noise in car tyres.

Much more could have been done for the aviation sector, however. It is odd that the report mentions rail, sea and inland waterway transport yet neglects this sector, one of the principal contributors of carbon emissions. It is because it lacks teeth in this area and so many others that I abstained on this report.

- Motion for a resolution B6-0107/2009 (Lisbon Strategy)

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, the Lisbon Strategy is worth supporting, but it has to be said in this regard that the idea that Europe might be the world's leading knowledge-based economy by 2010 is not going to be realised. We are now in 2009, and so if we want to achieve something, we should find the right sort of Europe-wide commitment very soon. Then we might achieve this objective perhaps by 2020 or 2030.

This mainly means that there has to be Europe-wide commitment to training and research very soon. At present, we have an economic recession on our hands and, amid this downturn, we have to remember that if we are to have adequate levels of good human resources – a workforce for our employment markets – we will need to invest in particular in training and teacher training. This is the priority if we really want to achieve the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Madam President, I have abstained from the vote on the resolution on the Lisbon Strategy, even though the resolution is, in fact, on the whole, a very even-handed resolution which gives an accurate diagnosis of the situation and also contains many proposals which I fully endorse. I abstained, though, because the subject of these notorious blue cards for economic immigration has once again been brought up and is receiving emphatic support precisely at a time when more than 20 million people in the European Union face unemployment, which is set to increase even further due to the economic crisis.

Precisely at times like these, we should stop resorting to easier short-term solutions, such as enticing hordes of economic immigrants to the European Union once again. Instead, we need to invest in training and retraining people who are currently unemployed, rather than just leaving them to their own devices in favour of an influx of new immigrants.

Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I cannot remember how I voted on the Lisbon Strategy. I think it is a completely worthless thing, because Europe was meant to be the leading knowledge-based society by 2010. Over the 10 years I have sat in this Chamber, I did wonder how we were going to get there when we were passing regulation after regulation that was stifling business and opportunity and, indeed, encouraging business to move away from the continent of Europe.

I am always reticent when it comes to these sorts of reports. Having sat in the Chamber for a couple of hours today voting about imposing more and more regulation on businesses and on people, I feel we are going in exactly the wrong direction from this Chamber and we need a huge about-face immediately.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I agree with many of the comments made by my colleague, Mr Heaton-Harris. As he correctly said, the Lisbon Strategy commits the EU to becoming, slightly ironically, the most competitive economy in the world by 2010. With just one year to go before that self-imposed deadline, I cannot be the only person in this House who wonders, and becomes more than a little sceptical, about whether we will ever get there.

We constantly pass resolutions and the Commission constantly produces strategy documents telling us how we are going to get there. It is just that we never seem to arrive.

The content of the Lisbon Strategy was always far in excess of the EU's capacity to deliver it, and was, in many ways, contrary to the whole ethos of the EU over the past 50 years because, as Mr Heaton-Harris reminded us, much of the EU's employment and economic regulation actually causes more difficulty in achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy than anything else. We are constantly piling on more and more burdens and regulations that force industry out of Europe, and we have no chance whatsoever of meeting any of the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. It is about time we were honest with ourselves and admitted that.

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the initial goals of the Lisbon Strategy committed the EU to creating a knowledge economy, an innovative economy, a digital economy, by the year 2010. Well, I have news for us all here in this packed Chamber: we are running out of time. You may not have noticed, but we have made very little progress so far.

Before I became a politician, I used to work with a lot of innovators and help lots of start-up companies. It was a real contrast, coming to the world of European politics, to see how we dealt with innovation. When we deal with innovation here, we have committees, we have strategy documents, we have votes, we have everything but innovation, unless you consider more paper creation to be innovation.

When you talk to the innovators out there, the people who are going to create wealth in the European Union and across the globe, what they want is for governments to keep out of the way. It is time the looters of government stopped draining the life-blood of companies.

Neena Gill (PSE). – Madam President, it is with heavy heart that I stand up to speak once again on Lisbon. I do not normally speak here just for the sake of being negative. I believe that the European Union talks the talk when it comes to the Lisbon Strategy. However, today, almost 10 years since the summit, it is a long way from walking the walk.

We hear many warm words about the need for the skilled workforce that will be able to adapt to economic upheavals, such as the one we face today. However, across Europe we still face a chronic skills crisis. In my region, the West Midlands, the skilling of the workforce has had a particularly painful and protracted birth. Regrettably, we have the highest proportion of skill-shortage vacancies of any British region. I would, therefore, call on the Commission not to lose sight of the structural reforms needed to reinvigorate the Lisbon

Strategy during a period which is beset with economic disorder, higher oil and commodity prices and ongoing turbulence on the financial markets.

- Motion for a resolution B6-01 34/2009 (Climate change)

Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the reason I want to give an explanation of vote on this particular report is because I cannot believe the hypocrisy of this House in talking as it always does about climate change.

Why is this House hypocritical? Well, look around you. We are in our second Chamber. We have a perfectly good Chamber back in Brussels. We are here for only three or four days per month. I admit that we are going to get an extra part-session this particular month, but only to average out for the one in 12 sessions that we need to do.

We have hundreds of people displaced from their normal places of work to come here. They travel and cause carbon emission while they are getting here. We are possibly the least green parliament that there is. When I entered this place, it was meant to be a paperless parliament yet, if you look around, all our desks are covered in paper. We are the worst hypocrites when it comes to this than any Chamber I know.

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I entirely agree with the sentiments expressed by the previous speaker. We should consider the fact that the European Parliament has two Chambers – in Strasbourg and Brussels – and we also have three sites, including the one in Luxembourg, which people do not talk about very often. Not only are we building a new block in Luxembourg, leading to more carbon emissions that could well contribute to climate change – or not, depending on what one believes on the issue – but also it is simply hypocritical for us to carry on debating climate change while we continue to operate out of three places of work.

Even if we were eventually to operate only out of one – Brussels – when you walk around the streets of Brussels at night and look up from Place du Luxembourg towards the European Parliament building, you see this great lit-up beacon to hypocrisy. If we are going to tackle climate change, it is about time we put our own house in order.

- Motion for a resolution B6-01 33/2009 (Employment Policies)

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Madam President, this resolution is full of good intentions, but we should ask ourselves if resolutions of this kind actually make any difference at all.

For example, it is beyond me that a resolution on employment policies, insofar as this is a European competence, which I do not believe it is, should choose to ignore very basic questions such as: how many people are currently unemployed in the European Union? 20 million still, or is it – more likely – nearer 25 million?

The question is: does the Commission still hold firm to its outrageous notion of importing more than 20 million new immigrants to the European Union? The question is: will the Commission finally abandon its recruitment centres in countries such as Mali and Senegal to import even more unemployment? These are the kinds of questions we had expected in the resolution, rather than the meaningless catalogue of good intentions which it has unfortunately become.

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE). – Madam President, once again we are talking about something that we are doing very little about, and that is employment policy. Once, a colleague said to me that when the European Parliament talks about employment, it is actually creating far more unemployment than one would expect. We have got to recognise that, if we are going to create jobs, we have to set the wealth creators free. We have to enable them to continue their spirit of free enterprise, to create wealth, to create jobs.

But what do we do here? By regulation and debate, what we seek to do is to choke off the very spirit of innovation, the very spirit of entrepreneurship, and we have continued to do that today. Only today Mr Schulz – who is a man I often disagree with, but not today – talked about the social democratisation of the EPP. Now that that day has come, we know that we are doomed when it comes to creating jobs in Europe.

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Madam President, have you noticed that the harmonisation of policy always happens in the same direction? More integration invariably means more intervention.

Or let us put that the other way around: pluralism guarantees competitiveness. If you have competing states with different tax levels, then you can only raise your tax to a certain level before your money starts going abroad. If you have competing states with different employment policies and different social policies, you can regulate your employment market only to a certain degree before the jobs start crossing your borders.

Now, during the good years, the European Union was able to disregard these verities and was able to construct behind its walls a highly regulated and centralised market. But those good years have come to an end. We now risk cutting ourselves off from more dynamic economies and becoming more penurious and more irrelevant and ultimately, like Tolkien's Eldar, going into the west and fading.

- Report: Luis de Grandes Pascual (A6-0097/2009)

Richard Corbett (PSE). – Madam President, I notice that at least some of those who have been denigrating all European legislation, whatever it is, nonetheless voted in favour of the third Maritime Package, a package that I welcome because it increases the health and safety of people on ships; it will ultimately cut costs because it will save lives downstream and it makes safety systems of different Member States compatible with each other, thus making them more efficient, more effective and less costly while, at the same time, improving health and safety. I welcome the adoption of this package, which will make a difference to the safety of hundreds of constituents of mine in Yorkshire and Humber.

- Report: Elisa Ferreira (A6-0063/2009)

Neena Gill (PSE). – Madam President, I voted in favour of this report as I was pleasantly surprised that our proposals against tax havens were adopted by the House. I was also in support of the wide-ranging remit given in this report to address the current crisis.

The one aspect that I really want to focus on is the recovery plan so far. We need to make certain that we still have secure jobs and sustainable careers for people when the economy begins to perform better and support key sectors such as the car industry. The automotive sector is a model of how traditional industries should adapt in the years to come. I recently visited the Jaguar Land Rover plant in my constituency, where I saw how the company has turned itself into a world leader in green automobile technology, and where the new type-approval guidelines we have been adopting in this House have been welcomed wholeheartedly.

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Madam President, once again we are indulging the fantasy that you can spend your way out of debt and legislate against recessions. At best, we are engaging in self-deceit; at worst, we are deliberately perpetrating a deceit against our electorate.

The truth is that nothing can stop this correction: interest rates were held too low for too long and now that the air has been pumped into the balloon, it is going to come out again. We could try to rescue some of the victims but, instead, we engage in this pretence that we can stop the thing happening. The debt will be paid by our children yet unborn and unbegot, and nowhere more than in my country, where every child is now born with a debt of GBP 30 000 because of the incompetence and incontinence of its government.

As our national poet says: 'This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land, ... is now leased out – I die pronouncing it – like to a tenement or pelting farm.'

And now, on top of that national debt, we are expected to contribute to these European recovery programmes. I close again with the words of our national poet: 'Prevent it, resist it, let it not be so, Lest child, child's children, cry against you, 'Woe!''

Jean-Claude Martinez (NI). – (FR) Madam President, one can cite as examples of major international financial crime the Madoff affair, obviously, but also the speculation in agricultural raw materials that took place in 2007.

This is why a whole host of legal experts, including Carlos Sotelo's practice in Spain, and networks of large practices, have proposed the creation of an international financial court.

We could, moreover, just extend the International Criminal Court's remit to cover major financial crime because, in 2007, millions of children died as a result of the speculation in agricultural products. There was a financial Darfur.

This international financial court would have the power to investigate speculation and speculators, to inspect tax havens, to regulate and to punish offenders.

This is the test of sincerity for Barack Obama, for President Sarkozy and for the other leaders. This is the political message to send out to the general public, and this would be the first stage of a global organisation, a global phenomenon and a global cure for a global economic crisis.

- Report: Evgeni Kirilov (A6-0075/2009)

Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE). – Madam President, it is very nice to speak after Mr Corbett in such debates because Mr Corbett is never wrong in this place; often confused, as he was today, giving the wrong explanation of vote at the wrong time, but obviously never wrong! I do wonder though whether, in this House, we know what the real economy is. Is the real economy a bunch of paper-pushers and bureaucrats, with us writing laws that other people have to implement, such as the Civil Service in the UK, where we have been growing the public sector way faster than the private sector has been growing over the last 10 years? Or is the real economy actually people doing jobs of work and innovating and starting their own businesses? I just wonder if this report is actually heading in the right direction. Having read it, I am pretty sure that it is not.

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Madam President, we in this House know, perhaps better than some outside, the extent to which the European Union has now become a mechanism for the massive redistribution of wealth.

For a long time, that system worked very well because there were only a very small number of people paying into the pot. The only two net contributors to the budget for most of the European Union's history were the United Kingdom and, outstandingly, Germany.

However, things have changed now, and the money is running out. We saw that vividly illustrated at the summit two weeks ago when the Hungarian prime minister demanded a EUR 190 billion bail-out for Central and Eastern Europe, and was told in no uncertain terms by the German Chancellor that the money was not there and would not be forthcoming.

German taxpayers (and this is rarely acknowledged) have always propped up the whole system. Integration rests on their sufferance, and they have now seen through this. They are not responding any more to the unspoken appeal to historical responsibility. They are a sensible, level-headed people and can recognise a self-serving argument and spot a racket when they see one. If you think I am wrong about this, then let them have a referendum; let everyone have a referendum: put the Treaty of Lisbon to a vote. *Pactio Olisipiensis censenda est!*

Written explanations of vote

- Report: Geringer de Oedenberg (A6-0060/2009)

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mrs Geringer de Oedenberg's report on the exemption from value added tax on the final importation of certain goods (codified version). As it is merely a codification of a previously existing legislative text and does not involve any substantial change to the text itself, I believe that we should endorse the Commission's proposal and the recommendations of the legal services of Parliament, the Council and the Commission itself.

- Report: Díaz de Mera García Consuegra (A6-0106/2009)

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I abstained from the vote on Mr Díaz de Mera García Consuegra's report on adjusting the basic salaries and allowances applicable to Europol staff. I only partly agree with the rapporteur's view on this matter, so I do not think it is appropriate for me to take a position on it.

- Report: Reimer Böge (A6-0106/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Madam President, I voted in favour.

I believe that the environmental disaster that struck Romania cannot go unheeded. Romania has emerged from the flooding exhausted, not only economically and environmentally, but also in social terms.

The reports of people's personal stories have been heart-rending – families have lost their property and possessions, many of which were the fruit of a lifetime of hard work.

Many organisations are already working on the ground, but the time has come for the institutions too, and the Members of this House personally, to make a real contribution to this cause.

I therefore welcome the opinion of the Committee on Budgets and hope that the EUR 11 785 377 from the Solidarity Fund will be made available to Romania as soon as possible, in order to lift the population economically, environmentally and socially.

Genowefa Grabowska (PSE), in writing. – (PL) The principle of solidarity is one which is fundamental and unquestionable in the European Union. It is precisely this principle, which exists, indeed, not only on paper, that distinguishes the EU from other international organisations. One practical expression of this principle is undoubtedly the Solidarity Fund, established in 2006 in accordance with an interinstitutional agreement and in order to eliminate the negative consequences of major natural disasters. It is good that the Fund is in operation, and that last year, five countries benefited from it. This is proof that, when faced by a tragedy, no Member State will be left alone. The flood which hit five areas of north-east Romania in July 2008 caused serious material losses (0.6% of GNI) and disrupted the lives of over two million people in 214 districts.

In this situation, I consider Romania's application for assistance to be justified, even if it does not meet the quantitative criteria laid down in Article 2(1) of Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund. I also have no doubt that in this case, it is necessary to apply the criterion of extraordinary disaster, which is also provided for in the aforementioned Regulation and which allows mobilisation of the Fund for Romania. As a Polish MEP, I represent a region that was also affected by a natural disaster, namely a tornado in the Silesia Province. Fortunately, that disaster did not have the same destructive power or scale. Nonetheless, I fully endorse this tangible evidence of European solidarity.

Maria Petre (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of this report as it will help mobilise the Solidarity Fund much more quickly. In 2006, the payment made by the European Union via the Solidarity Fund in aid to Romania after the floods in April and August was delayed by a year. I am pleased to note that the procedures have been improved and facilitate the EU's prompt intervention in countries which have been affected by a major natural or extraordinary disaster.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Böge's report on mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund. I agree that the eligibility criteria governing mobilisation of the Fund were met in the case of the application submitted by Romania following the floods that hit the country in July. The floods in fact caused serious damage to the landscape and to the people living in the five regions affected. I therefore feel that it is only right that the Fund should be mobilised, not least because the amount in question falls within the annual limit laid down in the Interinstitutional Agreement of May 2006.

- Report: Jutta Haug (A6-0113/2009)

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report drafted by Jutta Haug (Germany) as it requests the mobilisation of EUR 11.8 million from the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF) to help the victims of the floods which hit Romania in July 2008.

This gesture is the EU's response to the request for assistance made by Romania. The application relates to five counties (Maramureș, Suceava, Botoșani, Iași and Neamț). 241 locations in Romania, with a total population of 1.6 million inhabitants, suffered directly as a result of the disaster, which partially or totally destroyed houses and crops.

I voted thinking about the people who lost their homes, belongings, animals and even family members in the floods. Gheorghe Flutur, Chairman of Suceava County Council, pleaded their case in Brussels at the European Parliament.

I believe that Romania needs a larger sum to repair the damage caused by flooding, but the EU's assistance is necessary and welcome.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The first amending budget for 2009 relates to the mobilisation of the EU Solidarity Fund for Romania, following the floods that hit that country in July 2008.

Faced with direct damage calculated at around EUR 471.4 million, it is (only now) planned to mobilise just EUR 11.8 million under this Fund, which once again clearly shows the urgent need for its revision.

The objective of this Fund is to enable the Community to respond in a rapid, efficient and flexible manner to 'emergency situations' in the various Member States. That is why, despite all the inadequacies, we support its mobilisation for Romania.

However, the EUR 11.8 million allocated will be deducted from the budget line for the European Regional Development Fund (Convergence objective). In other words, the 'solidarity' offered to Romania is being financed from funds intended for the least economically developed countries and regions, including Romania itself! This is what can be termed as solidarity between the 'poor' or, in other words, between the so-called 'cohesion countries'/convergence regions ...

We disagree with 'cohesion' funds being used – all the more so at a time of worsening socio-economic crisis – when other funds are available, such as those intended for the militarisation of the EU.

Iosif Matula (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report on the mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund for Romania as I feel that the financial aid given to our country provides important, necessary support for the locations hit by flash floods in July last year. The north-eastern part of Romania was severely affected. 214 locations and more than 1.6 million people suffered directly as a result of the disaster. The European Commission made a financial contribution of EUR 11.8 million to support the investments made in repairing the transport and drainage infrastructure, reinforcing river beds and building dams to prevent natural disasters of this kind in the future.

I think that early detection of the causes which result in natural disasters of this magnitude or even more serious ones is the most important step towards protecting Europe's citizens.

Bearing in mind the climate change we are facing, I support the introduction of instruments for monitoring the environmental factors in each region separately, along with the allocation of an adequate budget for this. The zones of convergence are most exposed to the risk of being hit by natural disasters. This means that particular attention must be focused on these aspects in order to implement a policy of economic, social and territorial cohesion.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The areas susceptible to the effects of climate change are mainly the following: water resources, agriculture, energy, forestry and biodiversity, and last but not least, the population's health.

The extreme weather phenomena witnessed in Romania in recent years have caused floods and drought and have resulted in the need to tackle the issue of climate change with the utmost seriousness, expertise and responsibility.

As a social democrat, I voted for this report because the EUR 11.8 million allocated through the budget adjustment supports Romania in its effort to adapt to climate change in order to eliminate the effects of the floods by carrying out local protection work (protecting populated settlements, river basin planning through works for improving streams and increasing forested areas) and, last but not least, by involving the population and educating them about appropriate behaviour before, during and after the floods.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report on draft amending budget No 1/2009 of the European Union for the financial year 2009. The aim of the report is to mobilise EUR 11.8 million in commitment and payment appropriations from the EU Solidarity Fund relating to the effects of the floods which hit Romania in July 2008.

I support the European Commission's initiative whereby the EU is showing solidarity with Suceava, Iași, Neamț, Botoșani and Maramureș counties which suffered as a result of the floods in July 2008.

By means of today's vote, the European Parliament plenary session is endorsing the decision of the Committee on Budgets taken on 24 February 2009. During the relevant session, Gheorghe Flutur, Chairman of Suceava County Council, presented the situation in his region affected by floods, supporting the request for funds with pictures and the statistics for the damage resulting from the natural disasters which hit the area.

He indicated that warnings were sent and mentioned that, together with the authorities in the Ukrainian region of Chernivtsi, it was agreed to set up a rapid alert system in the event of disasters, along with other cross-border cooperation programmes for dealing with emergency situations due to be implemented as a continuation of this project.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mrs Haug's report on the amending budget for the financial year 2009, which takes account of the serious damage caused by the floods that hit Romania in July 2008. I have already expressed my support for Mr Böge's report on mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund in this particular case, and I wish to confirm here my support for the measure – provided that it focuses – as stipulated in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 2006, on the swift and effective

restoration of decent living conditions in the regions affected by the natural disaster, and not on the payment of compensation for damages suffered by private individuals.

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the motion for a European Parliament resolution on draft amending budget No 1/2009 of the European Union for the financial year 2009 (6952/2009 – C6 0075/2009 – 2009/2008 (BUD)) because its purpose is to mobilise EUR 11.8 million in commitment and payment appropriations from the EU Solidarity Fund relating to the effects of the floods which hit Romania in July 2008.

- Report: Luis de Grandes Pascual (A6-0097/2009)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), in writing. – Malta is one of the main EU states with a substantial tonnage on its register books. On the other hand, it discharges its obligations as a flag state, in accordance with international conventions.

The three main obligations are to: (a) apply the provisions of the Flag State Code; (b) take the necessary measures for an independent auditing of their administration at least once every five years, in accordance with the rules of the IMO; (c) take the necessary measures with regard to the inspection and survey of ships and the issue of statutory certificates and exemption certificates as provided for by the international conventions.

A new requirement is that, prior to allowing the operation of a ship which has been granted the right to fly its flag, the Member State concerned shall take the appropriate measures to ensure that the ship in question complies with the applicable international rules and regulations and, in particular, the safety records of the ship.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – This legislation will reinforce existing EU safety legislation and transpose major international instruments into Community law. I support this legislation because it recognises the need to closely supervise classification societies, which perform vital tasks in maintaining safety at sea, because of the major concentration of power they hold.

- Report: Luis de Grandes Pascual (A6-0098/2009)

Carl Lang and Fernand Le Rachinel (NI), in writing. – (FR) Eight legislative texts making up a maritime package have just been adopted in the European Parliament. We welcome this because the package covers not only passenger compensation, but also inspections, State inspection of ports, investigations into transport accidents and the choice of the authority able to decide on the place of refuge for vessels in distress.

The ball is now in the Member States' court because it is not enough to legislate: this legislation needs to be transposed into their national laws.

The first test will be to monitor the flags of convenience belonging to European countries. These flags are used to bypass the union, tax, recruitment, safety and environmental regulations of the countries to which the vessels really belong.

Cyprus and Malta are still today among the top five flags of convenience in terms of the number of vessels lost.

It is unfortunately notable that, despite the efforts made since the oil tankers *Prestige* and *Erika* sank, the situation has hardly improved. Substandard vessels sailing under flags of convenience are slashing transport prices. The so-called rich countries are responding by creating their own (mark II) flag to combat the loss of freight.

In reality, if we are truly to get rid of these floating wrecks, the European Union must set about fighting ultra-liberalism.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr de Grandes Pascual's report on common rules and standards for ship inspection and survey organisations. I have already explained the reasons prompting me to support the work carried out by the rapporteur in relation to the third maritime package, and the advantages that the planned measures could bring in terms of maritime transport safety and improvements to the existing regulations. As such, I confirm my vote in favour.

- Report: Dominique Vlasto (A6-0099/2009)

Bogusław Liberadzki (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I voted for adoption of the Report on the joint text approved by the Conciliation Committee for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on port State control (recast). I agree with the objectives of the 3rd Maritime Package.

The seven proposals of the package aim to prevent accidents by improving the quality of European flags, reviewing the legislation on port state control and vessel traffic monitoring and by improving the rules relating to classification societies. They also aim to ensure an effective response in case of an accident by developing a harmonised framework for accident investigation, introducing rules on compensation for passengers in case of an accident and by introducing rules on shipowners' liability coupled with a mandatory insurance scheme.

I should like to express my support for the agreement which has been reached, and in particular for these points: extension of scope to include also vessels calling at anchorages, increased frequency of inspection of vessels, and permanent banning of vessels under certain conditions.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mrs Vlasto's report on port State control, which forms part of the third maritime package. I agree with the part of the agreement reached about extending the scope of the directive to include vessels that call at anchorages and with that part about increasing the inspection rate of vessels in the highest risk category. On this point, I refer to the need for assessments of such risk to be as accurate and independent as possible. I also agree that, under certain conditions, vessels should be refused access permanently, in order to guarantee adequate safety levels for operators and passengers.

- Report: Dirk Sterckx (A6-0100/2009)

Bairbre de Brún and Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL), in writing. – We welcome the shift in emphasis in this resolution, and some of the positive proposals in relation to regulation of the financial sector, innovation, energy efficiency and investment, as well as acknowledgement of the need to protect employment, create jobs, combat poverty and focus on the most vulnerable groups in society.

However, the logic of the Lisbon Strategy is flawed and needs to be fundamentally revised, particularly in light of the new economic situation.

In addition, there are a number of specific proposals contained in the resolution which are short-sighted and counter-productive, such as the insistence on deregulation and on flexible employment practices leading to a weakening of workers rights.

For these reasons, we abstained in the final vote on this report.

Bogusław Liberadzki (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I voted in favour of adoption of the Report on the joint text approved by the Conciliation Committee for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2002/59/EC establishing a Community vessel traffic monitoring and information system.

I agree with the objectives of the 3rd Maritime Package.

The seven proposals of the package aim to prevent accidents by improving the quality of European flags, reviewing the legislation on port state control and vessel traffic monitoring and by improving the rules relating to classification societies. They also aim to ensure an effective response in case of an accident by developing a harmonised framework for accident investigation, introducing rules on compensation for passengers in case of an accident and by introducing rules on shipowners' liability coupled with a mandatory insurance scheme.

As shadow rapporteur for Mr Sterckx's report, I would like to express my full support for the document put to the vote.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I believe that the maritime package should be considered globally and as a whole, in line with the approach Parliament has always taken when dealing with its individual parts. I therefore voted in favour of Mr Sterckx's report on establishing a Community vessel traffic monitoring and information system, since this system fits into a wider context aimed at improving the safety of maritime traffic and making it easier to manage, something which I have already endorsed on many occasions. In the case in point, applying technology for the monitoring of ships would help make it easier to decide who is

liable in the event of accidents and to improve the procedures for accommodating ships in 'places of refuge'. For this reason, I feel able to endorse the report by voting in favour.

- Report: Jaromír Kohlíček (A6-0101/2009)

Guy Bono (PSE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of this report by the Czech Member of the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, Jaromír Kohlíček, on the investigation of accidents in the maritime transport sector.

This text emphasises the need to draw up, at European level, clear and binding guidelines to ensure that accidents at sea are monitored properly. It addresses the concerns that followed the sinking of the *Erika* oil tanker off the French coast. It is in order to prevent a repeat of such cases of mismanagement that the European Union has decided to impose a strict framework that deals with all the technical aspects and all the processes to be followed in the event of an accident: methodology of the investigations, a European database for marine casualties, safety recommendations, and so on.

I share the view that it is crucial to make the European maritime area one of the safest and most exemplary maritime areas in the world. This is what the 'Erika III' maritime package, of which the report forms part, is working towards. This is a real breakthrough for the maritime sector, and also for the environment, which is often a secondary victim of disrespectful conduct at sea.

Bogusław Liberadzki (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I voted in favour of adoption of the Report on the joint text approved by the Conciliation Committee for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the fundamental principles governing the investigation of accidents in the maritime transport sector and amending Directives 1999/35/EC and 2002/59/EC. I agree with the objectives of the 3rd Maritime Package.

The seven proposals of the package aim at preventing accidents by improving the quality of European flags, reviewing the legislation on port state control and vessel traffic monitoring and by improving the rules relating to classification societies. They also aim to ensure an effective response in case of an accident by developing a harmonised framework for accident investigation, introducing rules on compensation for passengers in case of an accident and by introducing rules on shipowners' liability coupled with a mandatory insurance scheme.

I should like to express my support for the agreement which has been reached and, in particular, for these points: the methodology for investigating accidents, a decision on the investigation, fair treatment of seafarers, and protection of witnesses/confidentiality of records.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Kohlíček's report on the investigation of accidents in the maritime transport sector. All too often, it is difficult to decide who is liable in the event of minor or serious accidents at sea. I am thinking of the case of the investigations that followed the real natural disaster caused by the accident involving the *Prestige* oil tanker and of many others that unfortunately continue to occur. Maritime transport deserves special attention because, aside from being the most economical in relative terms, it is one of the most dangerous in terms of the environmental consequences of an accident. I believe it is therefore necessary to establish clear and binding guidelines on how to carry out technical investigations into shipping accidents and to provide feedback to prevent accidents in the future. This is why I voted in favour of the report.

- Report: Paolo Costa (A6-0102/2009)

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Costa's report on the liability of carriers of passengers by sea in the event of accidents. I agree with him that it is highly appropriate for the provisions of the Athens Convention of 1974 relating to the Carriage of Passengers and their Luggage by Sea to be incorporated into European law, since the national differences that still exist do not make it possible to guarantee an adequate level of liability and mandatory insurance in the event of accidents involving passengers. Although this does not happen for other means of transport, I believe that the legislation should be fit for purpose in the case of maritime transport as well.

- Report: Gilles Savary (A6-0072/2009)

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I intend to vote in favour of Mr Savary's report on the insurance of shipowners for maritime claims since I agree with the recommendations made by the rapporteur concerning

the need to ensure that the obligation to provide insurance is fulfilled by shipowners entering waters under the jurisdiction of any Member State, including by imposing penalties where a ship is found not to be carrying a certificate on board, should such a finding be made. I agree that the amount of insurance should be set at the ceilings laid down by the LLMC Convention of 1996, which guarantees that the victims of accidents at sea are properly compensated. I therefore support the rapporteur's recommendation to approve the draft recommendation agreed with the Council.

- Report: Emanuel Jardim Fernandes (A6-0069/2009)

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I am in favour of Mr Fernandes's report on compliance with flag State requirements. It demonstrates Parliament's determination to maintain the integrity of the third maritime package when faced with interruptions in the Council's work on certain aspects, such as the subject of this recommendation. For this reason, I support the work done by Mr Fernandes and the members of the Committee on Transport and Tourism. I believe that the added value of the political agreement reached should be seen as important, above all since it calls on the Member States to introduce a quality management system for their maritime authorities and to comply with international rules in this area, the most important of which being those resulting from the International Maritime Organisation conventions. Aside from bringing advantages in terms of European flag quality and safety, the proposal will make it possible to improve competition conditions within the Community, and I therefore believe that it should be supported.

- Report: Saïd El Khadraoui (A6-0066/2009)

Brian Crowley (UEN), *in writing*. – (GA) The countries of Europe must work together to achieve the environmental aims of the Union. However, to ensure that the EU's environmental policy is sustainable, the principles of the EU and the different characteristics and needs of each Member State must be included.

The Eurovignette report contradicts these aims in the case of the peripheral Member States of the European Union.

The Eurovignette recommendations would penalise peripheral countries and the countries at the centre of Europe would benefit greatly. In my opinion, the Eurovignette recommendations contradict the principles of the Single Market and I think that it is discrimination against certain countries on the basis of geography. Ireland is an island that is situated at the edge of Europe. Lorries from other countries will not be coming through Ireland, but our heavy goods vehicles will have to pay a fee in many countries throughout Europe. There is no way around this: we must carry on business, we must export and import our goods. Under the Eurovignette proposal, countries that are situated at the centre of Europe will have competitive advantages as they will not have to pay the same fees. It is not right or fair to carry out discrimination of this kind based on the geographical location of any country.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – The Eurovignette Directive was created to harmonise levy systems on European roads – including vehicle taxes, tolls and charges relating to the use of road infrastructure and establish fair mechanisms for charging infrastructure costs to hauliers. The recent revision of the directive from the Commission proposes additional amendments to the Directive; such as cost assessment for the environmental impact of HGVs (Heavy Goods Vehicles) in terms of noise pollution, congestion and air pollution.

Countries with large amounts of transit traffic hold considerably different opinions to more peripheral countries, like my own, which depend on large volumes of traffic for importation and exportation of goods. While, in principle, these are fair, it should be implemented in a gradual and equitable manner. These are issues that we cannot afford to ignore. HGVs are frequently subject to time constraints and external timetables, like those of ferry operators. The construction of a port tunnel in Dublin city has done much to reduce the need for HGVs to be in the city centre, and has increased the quality of air and reduced noise pollution. This was a worthwhile investment.

I am not convinced of the need to create a European independent authority to fix toll levels, and would argue that this falls under the domain of subsidiarity.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the El Khadraoui report on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures.

It is important to give the Member States the opportunity to apply 'smarter' payments for the road haulage sector to cover the external costs and thus encourage more sustainable behaviour.

Whilst air and noise pollution must be taken into account, the same is not true of congestion, which is caused not only by road haulage. Such a charge would be discriminatory, since private cars are also responsible for congestion.

Furthermore, this sector is paying the consequences of the economic crisis through the price of oil and the costs of delivering goods. SMEs in the road transport sector will not be able to bear these additional costs in the midst of this economic crisis.

More should be done to adapt road infrastructure to the increase in traffic but, above all, a commitment should be made to sustainable transport, with priority given to low carbon-emitting modes of transport.

As an elected representative of the Rhône-Alpes region, I can testify to the failure of many road sectors in the Rhône Valley to adapt.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) During today's vote, the European Parliament adopted a draft directive concerning Eurovignettes, which makes it possible for Member States to impose charges for the use of road infrastructure by heavy good vehicles.

In the final vote, I voted against adoption of the directive. I think that introduction of the provisions of this directive will increase costs incurred by enterprises which provide transport services. These costs might be particularly detrimental to small and medium-sized enterprises, which do not have sufficient financial means available to allow them to replace their fleets. Furthermore, such provisions may also cause difficulties for firms during the present financial crisis, when many firms are facing increased difficulty in obtaining credit.

We should certainly seek ways to enable the use of more environmentally-friendly vehicles on our roads. We should not, however, use methods which are, in fact, another way of taxing enterprises.

Jim Higgins (PPE-DE), in writing. – On behalf of my Fine Gael colleagues in the Parliament I would like to clarify that we did not vote in support of the El Khadraoui report on the charging of HGVs, due to concerns over the legal basis for the proposal, concerns regarding the compulsory use of electronic tolling and the provision for earmarking of revenue. We fully support the principles behind the proposal, but believe the report's application of the principle is flawed.

Stanisław Jałowiecki (PPE-DE), in writing. – Not only did I vote against this report, but I also consider it dangerous to the European common market. This is mainly because of its unfair character and the fact it acts like a concealed tax. Moreover, it will not contribute to environmental protection. During this time of financial crisis, it is kind of absurd. This type of regulation shows that the EU is turning its back on its citizens.

Jörg Leichtfried (PSE), in writing. – (DE) I am voting in favour of the reasonable compromise on the new Eurovignette. Together with the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, I have been fighting for years – in the face of huge opposition from parts of the conservative Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats – to have the external costs (noise, congestion, pollution) included in the calculation of tolls, in order to transfer the financial burden from the taxpayer to the polluter, in other words, the heavy goods traffic.

I am opposed to the probable result of the compromise on the congestion costs because, as a result of the majority situation, it was only possible to ensure that they were recognised as external costs on condition that this applied not only to heavy goods traffic but to all causes of congestion, including cars.

It is likely that CO₂ will also not be included in the calculation because of the incomprehensible opposition of the PPE-DE. The amendment which I submitted to the committee, in which I asked for minimum tolls on all parts of the Trans-European Transport Network, did not receive a majority of the votes. I will introduce this proposal again during further discussions on this subject.

One particularly positive feature for Austria is the fact that the external costs and the so-called Alpine surcharge (a higher toll in Alpine regions) will probably not be offset. This means that Austria can charge a higher toll in sensitive Alpine regions and can still charge for the external costs as well. As a result, a higher Brenner toll will be possible.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I support this report which should encourage the shift of freight from the road onto rail. The report is part of a package of initiatives aimed at making transport more sustainable, and ensuring that users will only have to pay the transport costs directly related to their use of that particular mode of transport. Tolls will be charged for local noise pollution, local air pollution as well as infrastructure

damage/costs. This will create a fairer system of the 'polluter pays' principle, with safeguards built in to ensure market transparency and avoid discrimination.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Heavy goods traffic in Europe has increased since the EU expansion to the East and this is particularly noticeable in many Member States, including Austria. Now we have the problem that some factors cause high external costs which the public has to pay. Heavy goods transport throughout Europe is one of these factors and another is nuclear power stations.

If a toll is imposed on heavy goods vehicles without, at the same time, developing the railways and removing cross-border obstacles to rail transport, then we will have simply voted for more expensive goods and there will be no improvement in people's health and no reduction in pollution.

I believe it is counterproductive to penalise someone who is stuck in congestion. This will probably result in traffic moving back to the small villages and towns, which is something that we do not want. In the long term, the only option is to develop the infrastructure and this means that we need to make local public transport more attractive. The Eurovignette under consideration today seems to represent a reasonable compromise which is why I have voted in favour of it.

Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), *in writing*. – (IT) Madam President, environmental protection and road safety, the aims behind the draft directive in question, represent two goals that the European Union should pursue with determination to achieve a transport policy more mindful of the expectations and rights of its citizens. A number of amendments to the 1999 EC directive providing for taxation of the heavy goods vehicles that use certain roads are therefore welcome. These kinds of steps forward must be reasonable and gradual in order to prevent the collapse of an important sector of the economy in the current serious economic crisis, a sector almost exclusively based on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Moreover, Europe has not yet created a complete and effective intermodal system that would ensure a significant transition of freight transport towards less polluting sectors. Under these circumstances and because of its characteristics and efficiency, road transport is the most widely used system in the world of manufacturing.

With my vote today, I therefore wished to emphasise the importance of taking gradual but significant, not merely symbolic, steps towards safer and greener road transport, without illogical and counterproductive penalties for the industry.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I support the work done by Mr El Khadraoui on the charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures, and I have therefore voted in favour of his report. While I do not agree on some points such as including or not including certain external costs in the charge, I do agree with the 'polluter pays' principle. Mr El Khadraoui's excellent work highlights the need to allocate the revenue generated from the charge to the transport sector in its entirety. Lastly, I believe that the revenue generated by charging external costs must not end up being another form of taxation.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (NL) The proposal on which we are voting today is a revision and extension of the previous Eurovignette Directive and stipulates the tolling rules for roads. According to the proposals adopted, Member States can, from now on, pass on the cost of air pollution, noise and traffic jams to lorries. This is good news for the taxpayer. At the moment, we are all still paying for the damage caused by air pollution. Soon, it will be the polluter who pays. Moreover, in this way, we encourage transport companies to invest in cleaner lorries.

I have therefore voted in favour of this proposal, not least because the congestion charge was included as an additional external cost for mountainous regions. Traffic jams are a major contributor to air pollution, noise pollution and fuel waste. If we could use the proceeds from this levy to invest in transport by rail or water, we would address both the traffic jam problem and climate change. In addition, delays as a result of traffic jams cause major economic damage in the transport sector.

Unfortunately, climate costs as a result of the high volume of freight traffic were not included, even though the transport sector is a major culprit in emissions.

- Report: Michael Cashman (A6-0077/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), *in writing*. – (IT) Madam President, I voted for the report. Transparency is not just a symbol but a principle on which all institutional procedures should be based. Citizens and elective bodies must be assured the greatest possible access to documents held by the European institutions in order

to enable them to participate effectively in the political process and to hold the public authorities to account for their actions. For this reason I argued strongly in the past for the publication of parliamentary attendance.

Despite the progress made by the European institutions on openness and transparency, the situation cannot exactly be described as perfect and this recasting of Regulation (EEC) No 1049/2001 regarding public access to documents held by the European institutions should be seen as another step towards achieving an administrative environment where the availability of, and ease of access to, information are the rule rather than the exception. To conclude I would like to point out the great achievement recently accomplished: the European Parliament now uses no fewer than 23 official languages and European Community documents are available in all of these. This represents a guarantee of democracy.

Charlotte Cederschiöld (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SV) We Swedish Conservatives have today voted in favour of Mr Cashman's report A6-0077/2009 on the revision of the Public Access Regulation No 1049/2001 so as to work towards increased transparency within the European institutions. As regards Amendments 61 and 103 relating to Article 5, we believe that conciliation documents from the third reading should be made accessible immediately after the final conciliation meeting has ended, in contrast to the documents that are examined in the negotiations themselves. Documents from trilogues in the first and second readings should be fully accessible throughout the whole processes.

Chris Davies (ALDE), in writing. – I very much regret that into procedures intended to develop the principle that the public has a right to see EU documents, the Parliament has inserted emphasis that such rules shall not apply to MEPs. It is argued that this just restates rules already enshrined in the Members' Statute, but to many people this will just look like another case of 'one rule for them and another for us', and I am glad that the Liberal Democrat group did not support the amendments tabled by Mr Nassauer.

It is particularly important that details of all payments of expenses made to MEPs by Parliament be made publicly available. Our own auditors have revealed that some of the Parliament's Members are very definitely not 'honourable', in fact, some of them are cheats and rogues. The principle of full transparency is one that needs to be established at the earliest possible date if Europe's citizens are to have confidence in this institution.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Cashman's report regarding access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents. I support his commendable initiative, which is designed to bridge the gap between the common rules on 'classified information' (the so-called sensitive documents cited in the current Regulation No 1049/2001), by maintaining at regulation level some good principles taken from the internal security rules of the Council and Commission as far as these principles can also be applicable to a parliamentary body. Lastly, I support Mr Cashman's general aim, which is to amend this regulation in order to increase transparency without making this instrument too specific and difficult to implement.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) There is no doubt that the 2001 regulation brought about greater transparency for citizens by granting the public access to documents of the European institutions. It is good to revisit this regulation after seven years of practical experience. What can we see? Back in 2006, the European Parliament made many proposals to change the regulation with a view to improving transparency even more, but the Commission failed to give this any serious consideration.

What is more, the Commission proposal to review the 2001 regulation that is now before us contains stricter rules, which means less transparency. Accordingly, documents on trade negotiations are deemed confidential. Ultimately, this is a choice between the devil and the deep-blue sea. I therefore support the Cashman report, because, even though it is incomplete, it is, all in all, an improvement on the present Commission proposal. A more radical approach, however, with a total rejection of the Commission proposals would have been preferable because then, the Commission would have been forced to come up with a new and better proposal, which would only benefit transparency of the European institutions and really would bridge the notorious chasm between the EU institutions and the citizen.

- Report: Jan Andersson (A6-0052/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Madam President, as we know, the current economic and financial crisis is affecting Europe. I am very concerned for my country, Italy. The crisis means redundancies, and families, who have less and less money, are spending less and less. Therefore we need strong intervention. This crisis appears to be particularly serious, but how deep it goes and how long it lasts will depend on what we do. We must join forces: a coordinated European approach is crucial. Now, more than ever, we can see the pressing need to implement reforms rigorously in order to create quality jobs and welfare for European

citizens. We must reverse the trend towards radical restructuring, prevent job losses and stave off further pressure to cut salaries and social security payments.

We must rise to the challenges associated with the rise in unemployment and social exclusion. Furthermore, we need to improve the coordination of efforts, both on the part of the EU and the Member States, but it is equally important that the measures adopted within the framework of the economic recovery plan to address the crisis in the short term are consistent with the Community's long-term goals set out in the Lisbon Strategy. That is why I voted in favour of the report.

Carl Lang (NI), in writing. – (FR) It is remarkable that this report should admit several failures by the European Union on social issues. There is firstly the admission that the Lisbon Strategy objectives will not be achieved in 2010. Then, there are some interesting figures on the growing rate of unemployment, which rose from 7% in 2008 to 8.7% in 2009 and, more specifically, from 7.5% to 9.2% in the eurozone. In other words, there is a forecast loss of 3.5 million jobs.

This painful observation should make the pro-Europeans think about the radical reforms needed at Member State level to limit as much as possible the disastrous consequences of the economic and financial crisis, a crisis which originated in the ultra-liberalism and globalisation that are so dear to Brussels.

To this end, it is not credible to pursue a policy such as this aimed at maintaining guidelines for the Member States' employment policies. On the contrary, we need to call into question this authoritarian logic and give the States back control of their economic and financial resources, whilst introducing national and Community preference and protection, which would enable the recovery of the internal market and a return to growth.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) The full impact of the financial crisis which started in the US is now being felt in the real economy. The experts do not agree on the best response to this crisis and the best way of stimulating the economy in order to keep the unemployment figures in check.

However, even before the financial crisis, the situation on the labour market did not look at all bright. More and more people were being forced into part-time and short-time work and state-supported jobs were being constantly cut back. For some time, increasing numbers of people have been living below the poverty line, despite being in work. In light of the gloomy forecasts about the economy, it is likely that the number of people in full-time employment will continue to fall and, at some point, that part-time workers will also lose their jobs. We must do everything we can to avoid mass unemployment. It is by no means certain that the measures presented in this report are suitable or satisfactory in this respect. For this reason, I have voted against the report.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted against Mr Andersson's report. Although, in fact, on the one hand, I believe that we must join forces to reverse the trend towards radical restructuring, to prevent job losses and to stop further cuts in wages and social security benefits, on the other hand, I feel that the measures laid down by the Commission are, for the most part, not enough to guarantee sufficient cover and protection for the European Union's social and employment structure.

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The current economic crisis has, and will have in the near future too, repercussions on the employment market.

I voted in favour of the draft European Parliament legislative resolution on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States because I join the rapporteur in supporting the Commission's position, which proposed (as set out in the Annex to Council Decision 2008/618/EC of 15 July 2008) that employment policies are maintained for 2009. According to the Commission, this approach will create a sound framework capable of tackling the economic and financial crisis as well as continuing structural reform.

José Albino Silva Peneda (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) The current crisis is more than just an economic and financial crisis. It is, above all, a crisis of confidence. Its most dramatic sign is the high level of unemployment. However, unemployment does not only mean a loss of income, but also a loss of confidence in ourselves and in others.

To restore this confidence, we need to set out a very clear medium-term strategy.

In this respect, the role of political leaders is decisive, due to the signals and messages that they convey. Prudence, security, speaking the truth, and resisting easy propaganda on impracticable targets and self-praise are some of the good practices that could help restore confidence.

On the other hand, we need to create jobs and, to do this, the conditions must exist for investment by companies.

We must act quickly because, if nothing is done in this respect, the financing problems being faced by those countries with the largest deficits in the eurozone will lead to the deepening of the recession, a continual rise in unemployment and the loss of income for companies and families.

That is why I supported Mr Andersson's report, which proposes maintaining guidelines for employment policies in 2009.

- Proposal for a decision on Rule 139 of the Rules of Procedure (B6-0094/2009)

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) A further extension or, to put it another way, a further postponement of the enshrined right of all Members to speak in Parliament in their own language and for all documents to be drawn up in the official languages is neither comprehensible nor acceptable. A number of years have already passed since the accession of certain countries for which the limitation on the use of their language remains, in particular, Ireland and the Czech Republic, without the required linguists having been found. The justification put forward is vague and inconsistent, but financial priority has not been given to their training, which leads us to distrust the intentions. We cannot accept any threat to the inalienable right to cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU, which would also affect Portuguese. We cannot accept this discrimination.

Once again, we state our determination to protect the cultural identity of each Member State and of all national languages as working languages. In this respect, our vote can only be against this decision. Ultimately, this marks the transposition to the cultural and linguistic level of the EU's budgetary policies, which give priority to investment in arms instead of valuing culture and protecting employment.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of the Bureau's proposal for a decision extending the applicability of Rule 139 of Parliament's Rules of Procedure until the end of the seventh parliamentary term.

- Report: Magda Kósáné Kovács (A6-0038/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Madam President, I voted for the report. I am very concerned about the recent events in Italy. There is a 'witch hunt' atmosphere developing with regard to Romanian citizens and the Roma, with many punitive expeditions. The Italian Government is engaged in an obsessive security campaign. Adopting extreme measures with regard to Roma communities could however exacerbate the already terrible situation for these minorities and undermine opportunities for integration and social inclusion. We must not forget that, under the rule of law, criminal liability is individual and cannot be attributed to collective groups. To deviate from this principle would set a dangerous precedent that would lead to the criminalisation of entire ethnic groups or particular nationalities of migrants.

Certainly, immigration is a matter requiring European coordination in order to strengthen the judicial and police tools able to tackle organised crime. This is not enough, however. It is important to adopt clear employment policies for disadvantaged groups, including the Roma labour force, establishing support measures aimed at facilitating their progressive integration into the labour market and paying greater attention to education policies for young people.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The EU is a union of values and therefore responsible for maintaining respect for human rights within its borders. It also therefore has a part to play, via its Member States, in recognising the vulnerable situation of the Roma and in facilitating their integration into society. We have therefore voted in favour of this report.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SV) We have today voted in favour of the own-initiative report by Mrs Kósáné Kovács (A6-0038/2009) on the social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU. The report addresses a very serious problem and clearly indicates the need for action to get to grips with the widespread exclusion that affects many Roma today. We welcome cooperation between Member States in dealing with these huge problems.

However, we would like to point out that we do not see various different separate solutions as the way forward in reducing this exclusion. Special tax levels for employers who employ Roma women and other similar measures are more likely to have the effect of reinforcing the exclusion and counteracting integration into the rest of society.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The report from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs is welcome as it highlights a new aspect to the Roma inclusion strategy, devised, starting in 2005, over a series of European Parliament resolutions. The Roma's current situation shows that sufficient progress has not been made in integrating the Roma since the Commission launched its first appeal to this effect in 2005.

The report proposes important directives for action regarding the policy for promoting education among the Roma and encouraging positive discrimination on the labour market. Support for Roma integration into the labour market through funding measures for training and retraining, measures to promote independent activities among Roma, offering concessionary credits and public grants, as well as devising innovative forms of agricultural work, are all objectives which the EU has a duty to coordinate. Creating an EU-level expert group, including representatives of the Roma, could also help coordinate Member States' Roma strategy and the use of the Structural and Cohesion Funds.

I expect these suggestions to motivate the European Commission sufficiently to come up with legislative proposals aimed at achieving tangible results in this area.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – Roma people represent the biggest minority in the European Union and their integration into European society is one of the biggest challenges the EU will face in the coming decade. The Roma, comprising approximately 10-12 million people, have no chance of escaping from poverty and exclusion. Such a degree of social disadvantage hampers the attainment of a basic level of human dignity and equal opportunities for the Roma. I welcome this report which highlights the need to improve conditions for all Europeans, regardless of race.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) Guaranteeing equal opportunities to the Roma minority in the EU is the right approach in order to avoid social exclusion and respect this community's rights. This is why I voted in favour of Mrs Kovács's report which I regard as being very helpful.

However, I would like to make a couple of clarifications about my position on this matter.

Given that this minority is inherently transnational, an effective approach on Roma's rights can only be handled at European level. For this reason, I have suggested the creation of a European agency for Roma, with the role of coordinating at European level policies targeted at this minority.

Secondly, support for the Roma minority's integration cannot be given through redistributive fiscal measures as they cannot resolve the structural problems affecting Roma communities. The ideal way of supporting this minority must be geared towards education programmes, whose role is to help these communities acquire the skills required to access the labour market.

On the other hand, a European policy for the Roma minority must be aimed at promoting tolerance and acceptance of cultural differences, with the focus on peaceful coexistence within the limits stipulated by the laws of the relevant state and EU regulations.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I voted against Mrs Kósáné Kovács's report on the social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market in the EU. I firmly believe that this approach creates another form of fundamental discrimination in relation to the Roma. The Roma must, in fact, be treated like all other citizens, without their enjoying excessive benefits and concessions that are to the detriment of other European citizens, who have the same rights (and, above all, duties) as that population.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) The Roma community is Europe's largest and most disadvantaged minority group. Anyone who follows the situation closely knows that a coordinated approach is needed to improve their working and living conditions. I am delighted that the present report calls for appropriate training courses that can enhance the chances of the Roma within the labour market. In addition, the human and social capital must be reinforced by focusing from the outset on their integration in European society.

It is to be welcomed that a European group of experts, with representatives from the Roma community, is being set up. Equally, the proposals to set up partnerships, deploy sufficient financial means and follow all this via a database are excellent. I support this report because it suggests ways in which we can improve the situation of the Roma community. Since the alternative resolution proposed by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament is, unfortunately, too weak, I shall not be endorsing it.

- Report: Herbert Reul (A6-0035/2009)

Šarūnas Birutis (ALDE), *in writing*. – (LT) Oil demand management must not be limited to the EU alone. In percentage terms, the amount of global oil consumed by the EU will gradually decrease in the coming years. The huge growth in demand beyond the EU's borders alone will determine this. Therefore, from the point of view of the security of energy supply in the EU, it will be very important to reduce the growth in demand at global level as well, but without endangering the development goals of third countries or the EU itself. The promotion of market economy price setting mechanisms in third countries is also very important – for example, after eliminating state fuel subsidies.

All of these measures require investment. Investment is only possible when there is sufficient capital and there is a hope of some profit. Therefore, it is essential to overcome the current financial crisis, which may turn into an economic crisis, as quickly as possible. In the last decade, there has been an increase in the number of difficulties surrounding the future security of oil supply in the EU. However, if we succeed in encouraging political will and international coordination, cooperation and the creation of innovations, they may be overcome, purposefully having an impact on both supply and demand.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – On balance, I can support this own initiative report from my colleague, MEP Reul. As the past months have shown, the importance of energy security has never been as acute. The cooperation that is necessary from all Member States and the need to take advantage of the stimulus packages currently launched by almost all Member States and the Commission underscore the need for investment in renewable technology to increase our energy security and decrease our CO₂ emissions. Our years of dependence on fossil fuels have left us with two stark conclusions:

1. We need to be independent from global geopolitical forces, as the Russian/Ukraine impasse this winter showed and the ravages of OPEC's pricing policy.
2. Our need to meet ever pressing CO₂ reduction deadlines continues and should be maintained as a matter of utmost priority.

We cannot shy away from the challenges, both economic and environmental, with which we are currently faced.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted against Mr Reul's report on challenges in relation to the oil supply. I disagree with the rapporteur, in fact, when he states that, according to various estimates, it will be possible to extract sufficient quantities of oil to meet future demand also, but only by charging consumers more and by improving investment conditions. Although I support the Commission's initiatives to prevent oil prices from soaring over the next few years, I do not believe that the situation as a whole has been analysed correctly.

- Report: Georg Jarzembowski (A6-0055/2009)

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – The report that MEP Jarzembowski has presented makes the 'greening' of transport a priority and is an important first step towards a more comprehensive approach making transport more environmentally friendly. An essential part of the response to climate change is an alteration in our means and methods of transportation, be it in the adoption of advanced hybrid vehicles, in increased green public transportation, or the increased efficiency of other methods of transportation.

The rapporteur has advanced the options of charging Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) for the pollution they cause and including noise pollution caused by rail transport under the provisions of the report. It is important that we consider the needs of peripheral European countries who encounter several geographic barriers that depend on a strong transport network to supply their countries, and for their economic growth. We must ensure that these measures are applied in an equitable manner. With these reservations, I am pleased to support the report.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Jarzembowski's report on the greening of transport and the internalisation of external costs. My opinion, which coincides with that of the rapporteur – who has written an excellent report – emphasises the great benefits mobility brings with regard to Europeans' quality of life, growth and employment within the European Union, socio-economic and territorial cohesion, and trade with non-EU countries, as well as its benefits for the firms and employees involved directly or indirectly in the transport and logistics sector. From this perspective, I welcome the fact that the Commission,

in its communication, has compiled an 'inventory' of EU measures to date to promote a sustainable transport policy. This is a small step towards a major objective.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) The Commission has published a package of communications about 'making transport greener', a 'strategy for internalising external costs' and 'noise-reducing measures for goods and equipment'. It is very positive, to my mind – and is also something that I encourage – that green measures are being worked out in the area of transport.

The Jarzembowski report, however, would weaken the Commission proposals. This is why the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance have tabled positive amendments, including the request for more co-financing between the EU and the Member States, a kerosene tax for air transport and the uncoupling of an increase in transport from economic growth. Our amendments were not accepted, however, as a result of which this report has no added value for the Commission proposals. As such, I have voted against this report.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. – I support measures towards a greening of transport. This will help us in our fight against climate change. However, specific measures need to be strengthened and I had to abstain.

- Motion for a resolution B6-0107/2009 (Lisbon Strategy)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), in writing. – I fully concur that among the impacts of the economic crisis, the rise of poverty in the EU is the greatest concern. It is essential to halt the current rise in unemployment in the EU. I believe that the most efficient way of reducing and preventing poverty is through a strategy based on the goals of full employment, high quality jobs, social inclusion, measures to encourage entrepreneurship and activities to boost the role of SMEs and investments. In a nutshell, this is the most important part of the preamble to the resolution.

If we fail to stem the rise of poverty in the EU as a result of the existing exceptional circumstances, then the EU will have failed to address the most important issue stemming from this economic and financial calamity.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) In the European Union, we have been seeing an increase in levels of poverty, precarious work and inequalities, a situation which may become worse in the current economic and financial crisis, given that the predictions point to a recessionary trend and to an increase in the number of unemployed.

The policies enshrined in the Lisbon Strategy and in the European Employment Strategy have contributed to this situation as they promote financial deregulation, market liberalisation and insecurity in labour relations. As a result, what was needed was a break with these policies. However, faced with worsening social and economic conditions, the response (or lack of response) from the EU reflects its class choices, insisting on continuing with policies which promote the accumulation of huge profits by the large economic and financial groups, to the detriment of the living conditions of workers and the general population.

What is needed is a reversal in the current macroeconomic policies and the defence of jobs and workers' rights. We need an alternative policy that guarantees a fair distribution of income, stimulates economic activity, creates jobs, reinforces the state's role in the economy, boosts demand, encourages the growth of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and revives investment, bearing in mind the needs and specific aspects of each Member State.

Glyn Ford (PSE), in writing. – I voted for this report despite my disappointment at Amendment 10 by the Greens calling for the introduction of an EU-wide financial transaction tax. As President of the Globalisation Intergroup in this Parliament, I strongly support the introduction of a Tobin-type tax to both control financial speculation and raise billions of euros to help alleviate deep poverty in the world amongst the billion plus living on less than a euro a day. Who can be against such a simple and effective measure?

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) The Lisbon Strategy was thought up in a context and for an economic context which is clearly different from the one in which we currently find ourselves. However, this fact does not mean that all its underlying concepts need to be revised. A distinction must be made between the exceptional nature of the current circumstances and the policies that should be pursued in order to promote European development and competitiveness in the long term. However, it is important not to conclude from this distinction that the crisis situation requires measures contrary to good policies. Quite the contrary. The response to the current situation, although demanding exceptional measures, must be guided by the ideas of good policies and by opting for investment in innovation and in the competitive capacity of Europe,

otherwise we will fail both to respond to the crisis and to prepare the Member States of the European Union for the next phase of the global economy.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) After carefully studying the motion for a resolution on the Lisbon Strategy, I decided in the end to abstain and thus not to vote either in favour or against the motion.

Eoin Ryan (UEN), *in writing*. – The financial and resultant economic crisis have dwelt a huge blow to European growth and the stability of the job market. In these difficult times, our primary aim must be, as this joint resolution says, to protect EU citizens, whether workers, entrepreneurs, householders, from the effects of the crisis. While the current crisis is undoubtedly devastating, it also offers opportunity: opportunity to change our way of thinking; opportunity to build a strengthening framework for sustainable growth that can withstand potential shocks; and opportunity to build a sound economic and social base for the future.

Among the elements of this resolution that particularly appeal are the recognition of the crucial role of small and medium-sized enterprises and the support that needs to be given to them. Not only do SMEs provide valuable employment, accounting for 80% of new jobs in the EU in recent years, but they also play a key social role in stimulating local economies, diversifying employment and encouraging entrepreneurship. Similarly, the emphasis on innovation – especially in the environmental sector – is very welcome and an illustration that the twin goals of energy efficiency and economic stability need by no means be mutually exclusive.

Peter Skinner (PSE), *in writing*. – The EPLP believes that the Lisbon Strategy remains an important platform for growth and job creation across the EU. This is still an objective which is achievable, even if the current economic climate damages the true potential. However, the EPLP does not agree that an EU-wide transaction tax is a necessary vehicle to achieve some of the Lisbon Strategy objectives and did not support this measure.

However, the EPLP could support the main thrust of the approved text and therefore voted in favour of the report.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), *in writing*. – According to the Allianz Group report which was published on Monday, the recession is slowing the EU this year in reaching its goal of becoming the world's leading knowledge-based economic area. In order for us to reach the Lisbon targets, we must do all we can, even in these tough times, to meet these goals. By meeting these goals, we will be able to see our way through the recession, making the EU stronger placed in the future. We must also keep to the Barcelona targets on childcare.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) The resolutions by the political forces of capital conceal the causes and character of the capitalist crisis. They shift the burden of the crisis on to the workers, who paid for the excessive profits of capital and are now being called upon to pay for the crisis and to save and increase capitalist profit. The motions call on the European Union to deepen the anti-labour Lisbon Strategy, to apply the Stability Pact and the Economic Recovery Plan and to proceed with the full liberalisation of the internal market. They propose measures to support monopoly groups by granting an abundant flow of money from the workers' pockets, reducing the taxes on capital and increasing lending to large monopoly companies. They are promoting faster capitalist restructurings predicated on the 'flexicurity' strategy and the Directive on the organisation of working time, in other words on increasing working times by up to 13 hours a day and 78 hours a week and dividing working time into active time and unpaid inactive time.

The development of the 'green economy' and the liberalisation of research and of energy and innovation are paving the way for profitable investments by capital to the detriment of the workers and grassroots classes.

The informal summit on 1 March confirmed the escalation in imperialist infighting and the united front of the monopolies against the people.

- Motion for a resolution B6-0134/2009 (Climate change)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), *in writing*. – I agree that the EU maintains a leading role in international climate policy. However, unless it speaks with one voice, this will result in loss of credibility. The EU as a whole appears to be on track regarding targets for climate change, but all countries including Malta have to be careful not to lag behind, as this will affect the credibility of the Union.

Limiting global average temperature increases is necessary not only in the developed world, but also in developing countries. Needless to say, such actions will strain financial resources. The EU has to provide a plan which will address relevant areas and sources of financing.

Edite Estrela (PSE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution on combating climate change. The European Union must maintain its leading role in international climate policy and make every effort to reach an agreement in Copenhagen allowing a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere and the limitation of the global temperature increase to less than 2 °C above pre-industrial levels.

Given the current financial and economic crisis, reaching a new agreement in Copenhagen on combating climate change is fundamental. The economic crisis and the climate crisis can be combined to offer major economic opportunities to develop new technologies and create jobs.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This resolution contains positive aspects, which we value. We would highlight the call for the European Union to actively pursue an agreement in Copenhagen which takes into account the most recent scientific reports on climate change, which commits to stabilisation levels and temperature targets that provide strong probability of avoiding dangerous climate change, and which allows for regular reviews to ensure that targets are in line with the latest science. Likewise, we regard as positive the attention drawn to the need to significantly increase financial resources, in order to allow the necessary mitigation action in developing countries.

However, we disagree with the insistence, albeit only in the recitals, on the EU emission trading scheme, particularly as it is stated that this could work as a template for the development of emission trading in other developed countries and regions. We therefore disagree with the economics-based approach, which clearly influences various points of the resolution.

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this resolution by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. Despite the depth and breadth of the current financial crisis, a product of deregulation, cowardly regulators and greedy bankers, we cannot take our eyes off the need to continue to act to halt climate change. We need to see the current crisis as an opportunity to spend resources to achieve a step change in our lifestyles and promote a green new deal across the continent and the world. We cannot achieve our goals unless we work in partnership with the US and Japan, China and India.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I agree with some points of the resolution on combating climate change. On the other hand, I cannot support several paragraphs of the report. I have therefore decided to abstain and not to vote on this matter.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), *in writing*. – We must use the green economy to create jobs throughout the EU. This must be a priority during the financial crisis.

- Motion for a resolution B6-01 33/2009 (Employment policies)

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), *in writing*. – (SV) This resolution contains many deserving exhortations. However, most of what is dealt with in the resolution lies within the political responsibility of the national parliaments.

The proposals in the resolution will also result in a requirement for greater resources for the EU's Globalisation Adjustment Fund. This will entail an increase in the Member States' fees to the EU. This comes at a time when Member States need to retain their reduced economic resources for their own social and employment policies. We do not believe that the EU's Globalisation Fund is the most effective way to support workers who have lost their jobs. The Member States are better placed to pursue an effective policy in this area. Moreover, the Member States are all spending sums of money on stimulus packages of the same magnitude as their total contributions to the EU's budget.

We have voted against this resolution, primarily because of the wording relating to the EU's Globalisation Adjustment Fund.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted against the motion for a resolution on employment policy guidelines. In fact, given that the global financial and economic crisis calls for a determined and coordinated response from the EU to prevent job losses, to maintain a satisfactory income level for Europeans, to prevent a recession and to turn the current economic and employment challenges into opportunities, I believe that the measures taken under the governance of the Eurocrats are definitely not enough to bear the weight of the crisis that we are going through, not least in a sensitive sector such as employment.

- Report: Elisa Ferreira (A6-0063/2009)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), *in writing*. – The initiative to launch the Recovery Plan is a reaction to the serious ongoing economic downturn. The top priority of the Recovery Plan must be to stimulate the economy and competitiveness of the EU, and to avoid increased unemployment. Members insist that all financial aid must be timely, targeted and temporary. The present exceptional circumstances have to be seen within the wider context of a firm commitment to bringing normal budgetary discipline back on track as soon as the economy recovers.

In addition, the Recovery Plan must also serve the purpose of delivering a fair international agreement to give poorer countries the opportunity to escape poverty without fuelling global warming, by helping to finance massive investment.

Finally, coordinated action between Member States must be directed at reducing uncertainty in the credit markets and facilitating the functioning of those markets.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Despite certain positive and timely proposals having been adopted, which we supported, particularly the one on tax havens, regrettably most of our group's proposals were rejected, and the main tack of the report is to continue with the neoliberal policies, with a few rose-coloured touches for voters to see in the run-up to the electoral campaign.

Among our rejected proposals were those calling for a significant increase in financial resources and quicker application of the funds intended to support employment, and also a redirection of support programmes towards the most vulnerable groups, including programmes guaranteeing decent living conditions and universal access to high-quality public services. I also regret the rejection of proposals such as those which regarded the amount of the Recovery Plan (1.5% of EU GDP) to be insufficient to successfully tackle the current crisis, noting that the EU will lag far behind countries such as the United States and China. Furthermore, I regret the rejection of our criticism of the Commission for linking the Recovery Plan to the expansion of neoliberal 'structural reforms' and to strict compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact, when what was needed was to dispense with these and change tack.

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing*. – I can only congratulate my colleague Elisa Ferreira on her report on the European Economic Recovery Plan. I would endorse the sentiments of Poul Rasmussen that we have not yet done enough. The bail out of the banks was a necessary but not sufficient step. We must also take steps to deal with the problems of the labour market. Work-sharing must be encouraged and when short time is demanded, we should encourage maintaining hours at the workplace by utilising the time for training to improve skills.

The real crisis is not in the subprime mortgage market but rather in the ten times larger casino economy of the increasingly esoteric and fantasy world of the derivatives market, which needs to be brought under control. I therefore welcome moves to control tax havens and to introduce an EU-wide financial transaction tax to overcome the worst consequences of the crisis, mitigate speculation and raise finance to help us stay on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (PL) The report on a European Economic Recovery Plan, adopted today, supports measures proposed by the European Commission which are intended to stimulate the European economy.

Data from the last few weeks do not engender optimism. It is estimated that economic growth in Europe in 2009 will remain at a level below zero. Throughout the EU, unemployment is also growing. This is the most serious recession to have affected the European Community and the first since the introduction of the common currency.

Determined action is therefore needed, leading to the creation of jobs and a real improvement in the economic situation. A key question is, of course, the so-called healing of the financial system, so that enterprises and citizens can have access to credit. This is particularly relevant to small and medium-sized enterprises, which are, surely, the foundation of the European economy. This is why the effective and rapid restoration of the award of credit must be ensured urgently. Aid designated for combating the crisis must not only be directed at rescuing selected sectors. Such aid is unavoidable, but it should also include an ongoing approach to the competitiveness of European industry. In addition, the crisis must not be used as an opportunity to introduce new, excessively burdensome regulations.

I hope that the European Economic Recovery Plan will soon produce results in the form of the first signs of economic stimulation.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) Exceptional situations call for exceptional resources.

The economic situation has deteriorated so much that it justifies concerted action by the Member States to try to relaunch economic activity. Several observations are called for, however. The exceptional situation we are experiencing does not call into question the basic rules of economics. Borrowing today means debts tomorrow, debts that the Member States will be obliged to repay at a future date. Deficits may be necessary, but there will be a heavy price to pay. We have to be aware of this. There is already talk of increased taxes in the near future to keep public finances afloat.

Secondly, all the spending commitments in the recovery plans are far from being of equal merit. Investment spending on the modernisation of production equipment or on research has a very different value to money spent on operating costs. It would therefore be a good idea for the Member States to provide themselves with the appropriate tools for making the best choices.

Finally, since words do have meaning, let us be clear that the recovery plan is not, in truth, a European plan, but rather a coordination of national measures taken by the various Member States. Do we need to do more? The question is worth asking, but the setting up of a common European Union recovery plan would presuppose fundamental reviews of European policies and resources.

Adrian Manole (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The European Economic Recovery Plan is especially important because of its two key elements: firstly, short-term fiscal stimulus measures aimed at boosting demand, protecting jobs and restoring consumer confidence and secondly, smart investments to boost economic growth.

The European Union's number one priority is to protect its citizens from the adverse effects of the financial crisis. In the case of the Romanian economy, these measures will show their effectiveness, especially for SMEs, by simplifying and speeding up procedures and providing Structural and Cohesion Funds, as well as rural development funds, in advance.

The positive vote given to this report also means that the European Social Fund will have to finance measures promoting employment, especially in favour of the most vulnerable population groups. Framework conditions will also have to be created to alleviate the impact on the business sector as this sector has a key role to play in the economic recovery, making a crucial contribution also to creating jobs and therefore generating demand in the internal market.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of Mrs Ferreira's report in the firm belief that it will help overcome the difficult economic period which Europe is going through, following the neo-liberal policies of the last 10 years.

The rich European states must show solidarity with Eastern Europe, and the aid fund granted to countries in this area must be increased. In our view, as European socialists, we must act to eliminate the differences between the more developed countries and developing countries, all the more so as the latter countries' economies are closely linked to the banking institutions in the West. This is why we need a plan to coordinate the economies of all Member States.

We support the introduction of measures against offshore financial activities which allow very high-earners to switch their businesses to these tax havens, without paying any tax, while the majority of EU citizens are paying taxes and losing their jobs. The figures are alarming: by the end of 2009, the number of unemployed is expected to reach 25 million for the whole of Europe (500 000 in Romania). Abolishing tax havens will get rid of unemployment.

We need to promote and support European solidarity between old and new Member States, which makes the vote on the amendment relating to this issue a test for the EP.

John Purvis (PPE-DE), in writing. – The economic situation in Europe and further afield is as grave as any of us can remember, and it is absolutely right that the European Union and the Member States do everything that they can to ensure that a recession does not turn into a slump and that where government action really can kick-start economic activity, it should be allowed to do so.

This report is not perfect and we cannot agree with everything in it, but it reiterates the key points that the downturn is not an excuse for protectionism, excessive debt or the removal of competition rules. We have resisted efforts from the left, whose amendments have aimed to turn a reasonable report into an unaffordable shopping list or an attack on capitalism and the financial system in general.

It is now important for all of us to roll up our sleeves and get our economies working again. This report recognises that the free market and the individuals and businesses of Europe are vital to the reconstruction process, and it is on that basis that the British Conservatives support it.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) Despite containing positive elements, Elisa Ferreira's report on the European Economic Recovery Plan suffers from the same problems as the plan itself: it depicts the situation without having properly set out a real understanding of the causes of the current crisis; it lists the initiatives required to restore the confidence of economic operators without, however, having identified to date any evidence of this effect; and it offers little in terms of European mobilisation. For that matter, on this point it should be added that, if this report solves little in concrete terms, that is because the European Parliament has little ability to do so. The same can be said for the European Commission.

Out of this plan's budget, only 15% will be funds managed at Community level. The answer will therefore indeed have to be found at European level, but primarily through the political willingness of the Member States to coordinate their responses to the current economic situation. The impetus must come from the Member States, if it comes at all, given that the current signs of a lack of European political will are worrying. You only have to look, for example, at the contradictory positions adopted by the German or Austrian Social Democrats in the EP or when they are representing the governments of their countries.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) I agree with some points of Mrs Ferreira's report on a European Economic Recovery Plan, but I do not subscribe to it in its entirety. For this reason, I have decided to abstain and not to vote for my fellow Member's report.

José Albino Silva Penada (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) The main problem created by this crisis is the rise in unemployment, a situation which can only be reversed by increasing investment.

In order to increase investment, we need credit to be accessible and cheap, but everything is pointing to the fact that, for the time being, this will be scarce and much more expensive for the most vulnerable countries, such as Portugal.

These countries are facing increased financing difficulties, which is why I clearly support the possibility of having, in the eurozone, a single central issuer of European public debt. For that matter, this is the scenario which is most compatible with the long-term sustainability of the euro.

In the current circumstances, it is vital to reinvigorate the European credit market by granting responsible loans to viable businesses and to families.

The financial assistance given to banks and businesses must also be well-directed, temporary, transparent, guaranteed in cost-benefit terms and strictly controlled.

The solidity and solidarity of the European project may be at stake and we must therefore act in a coordinated manner and respect the rules of the internal market, without allowing any protectionism.

I support the report on the European Economic Recovery Plan presented by my fellow Member, Elisa Ferreira, as I agree with the general lines of its approach.

Peter Skinner (PSE), in writing. – This report accompanies the recovery plan of the European Commission, which attempts to reinvigorate the EU economy. The EPLP can support the main thrust of the rapporteur's ideas and believes that many of the issues outlined are critical for a real recovery.

The Commission response during the economic crisis has been muted and Parliament believes that more effective tools are required to produce recovery. In fact, an environmental approach could lead to greater innovation and spark renewed productivity whilst also having a positive effect on our environment. However, care has to be taken not to injure specific industrial sectors or reduce our overall economic possibilities, and therefore consideration of a targeted approach is very necessary. Similarly, a new approach to financial supervision denoted by the de Larosière wise men's report is also vital to ensuring against systemic risks.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) The Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance takes the view that what we are experiencing now is a culmination of three crises that are interrelated: an economic crisis,

an environmental one and a social one. This is why the Verts/ALE Group is opposed to promoting a 'European recovery plan' in the light of the imminent European Spring Summit, whose only mission is to stimulate the old *laissez-faire* model back into life.

Pumping enormous sums into this model carries the serious risk of deepening the environmental and social crises. It is counterproductive simply to increase demand in order to bring production back on song. This is exactly what the Ferreira report proposes, which is why I voted against it.

The economic recovery plan must make new financing instruments possible and, at the same time, by means of regulations, inject stability and reliability into the system. The incentive to go for short-term profit by means of a selection of bonuses must be removed and replaced by rules for so-called lever funds and private equity funds. Transparency, open bookkeeping and supervision must render tax havens impossible. By means of a precise description of tasks, banks can once again become servants of the real economy, where the European Central Bank can act as a guard dog.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. – The financial crisis is the first test of globalisation. A crisis fuelled by greed and now consumed by fear should make us question our fundamental values and what kind of society we would like to live within. This is not a time for narrow nationalism, but a time where a strong Europe has never been so important. The need for a coordinated approach, not just across the EU, but across the world, makes the G20 in London so important.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the Ferreira report, which calls on the European Commission to come up with strong, clear guidelines aimed at better coordination among all Member States in terms of management of this powerful economic crisis with a view to protecting as many jobs as possible. I urge the Commission to initiate the relevant procedures as soon as possible.

Through this report, the European Union is inviting the European Spring Council to give a strong political impetus and draw up a roadmap for all the legal initiatives in order to guarantee, along with Parliament, that they will be adopted in good time.

The report highlights the extremely adverse economic and social consequences of the crisis in many of the new Member States, which poses a considerable risk of destabilisation and increasing poverty. Spill-over effects are expected to affect the euro and the economies of the eurozone. We urge a coordinated approach at Community level, bearing in mind Community solidarity and the adoption of collective responsibility in this regard. We also invite the Commission to review and consolidate all the instruments aimed at stabilising the Member States affected, which includes stabilising exchange rates, so that security provisions and rapid, effective response packages can be implemented.

Marianne Thyssen (PPE-DE), in writing. – (NL) I have listened very carefully to the speeches of the rapporteurs and the group chairmen, including the swipe which the group chairman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament took at the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats with regard to their voting behaviour in respect of Amendment 92. Indeed, we do not agree with the implications of this amendment, and together with my group colleagues, I voted emphatically against it. Surely it cannot be the intention to take short-term measures that undermine long-term objectives?

For this reason, it is not reasonable to force Member States into making a budgetary effort, irrespective of their level of blame, which is an important factor in establishing to what extent deficit spending can be justified. My group was right to hold firm to its opinion which it shares with the Commission, namely that we should also have future generations in mind. This is why it is justified to vary the budgetary incentives according to the level of blame of the Member States. For this reason, demanding a uniform effort of 1.5% of GDP is not viable or justified.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The European Economic Recovery Plan shifts the burden of the capitalist crisis on to the workers' shoulders, promotes the more general aims of the EU and protects the profits and collective interests of the plutocracy.

The purpose of the all-out attack on insurance and labour rights and on the incomes of grassroots families and their standard of living is so that the EU can assure the euro-unifying monopolies that they will be 'in an advantageous position when the economy recovers' compared with the international competition.

The EU and the governments are trying to obtain grassroots consent, using the carrot and stick method, in order to impose with the least resistance the capitalist restructurings set out in the Lisbon Strategy: revolving

employment and unemployment, an increase in the retirement age and drastic cuts in wages, pensions and social benefits.

Moreover, the decisions taken at the summits and the financing of measures solely by the Member States highlight the escalation in imperialist infighting, which leads to a policy of 'every man for himself'.

There is only one choice for the workers: resistance, disobedience and counterattack with the Greek Communist Party, condemnation of the policy of the European one-way street and of the forces that support it, the reorganisation of the grassroots movement and the fight for grassroots power and the grassroots economy.

- Report: Evgeni Kirilov (A6-0075/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), *in writing*. – (IT) Madam President, I voted for the report. Transparency is not just a symbol but a principle on which all institutional procedures should be based. Citizens and elective bodies must be assured the greatest possible access to documents held by the European institutions in order to enable them to participate effectively in the political process and to hold the public authorities to account for their actions. For this reason I argued strongly in the past for the publication of parliamentary attendance.

Despite the progress made by the European institutions on openness and transparency, the situation cannot exactly be described as perfect and this recasting of Regulation (EEC) No 1049/2001 regarding public access to documents held by the European institutions should be seen as another step towards achieving an administrative environment where the availability of, and ease of access to, information are the rule rather than the exception.

To conclude I would like to point out the great achievement recently accomplished: the European Parliament now uses no fewer than 23 official languages and European Community documents are available in all of these. This represents a guarantee of democracy.

Jean Marie Beaupuy (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) This own-initiative report should be viewed from the perspective of the legislative debate under way aimed at amending the regulations relating to the Structural Funds and, in particular, the ERDF regulation (Angelakas report) and the ESF regulation (Jöns report).

In an effort to reach an agreement at first reading and give a rapid response to this crisis, which directly affects the people of Europe, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe has chosen not to amend the legislative proposals. For the sake of consistency, this same approach has been applied for this vote.

My colleagues from the MoDem party and I share the same concerns regarding the fight against climate change. The latter will have to be confirmed as a priority of cohesion policy after 2013.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Do not count on us to praise the hollow European Economic Recovery Plan, which, for the most part, will be self-financed by each of the Member States ('European solidarity' at its best ...) and which does not call into question the neoliberal policies that are at the root of the worsening working and living conditions of the overwhelming majority of the population.

As a result, not surprisingly, the majority of Parliament rejected our proposals, which:

- condemned the fact that, at a time when the socio-economic crisis in the EU is worsening, the Community budget for 2009 is 'the lowest ever';
- insisted on increasing the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund;
- underlined that 'additional advanced payments' under these Funds would result in a reduction in Community financing over the next few years;
- criticised the under-implementation of these Funds, particularly in the context of worsening socio-economic conditions in the EU;
- demanded that these Funds be regarded as a spending target and proposed increasing the rate of Community cofinancing and abolishing the N+2 and N+3 rules with regard to these Funds;
- insisted on these Funds being effectively used to promote real convergence, thus abandoning their constant subordination to the neoliberal objectives of the 'Lisbon Strategy';

- insisted on fighting company relocations.

David Martin (PSE), *in writing*. – I support this report which recommends faster, more flexible payments for structural funding. This report will ensure wide use of structural funds to secure jobs, and to create more jobs. I welcome this report which calls for funding to be provided to projects earlier and reduce the need for bank loans.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted against Mr Kirilov's report on Cohesion Policy: Investing in the real economy. It is, in fact, crucial to understand that the EU's cohesion policy makes an important contribution to the European Economic Recovery Plan and is the Community's largest source of investment in the real economy, providing targeted assistance for addressing priority needs and areas with growth potential, both in the public and in the private sector. However, this ought to make us think about the mistakes made in the past that have led to this serious economic situation. Strict legislation is required in this sector, too, otherwise the same mistakes are liable to be repeated in cycles.

7. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 1.55 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

8. Statement by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I would like first of all to ask for your understanding and to apologise for the fact that the session is starting so late, but I was only told two minutes ago that I will be asked to make a statement on a very sad event. I would like to make this statement now with your consent.

It is with great sadness and outrage that we have heard today about events in the town of Winnenden in Baden-Württemberg in Germany, where fifteen people were tragically killed at the Albertville secondary school. The perpetrator, a seventeen-year-old former student at the school, later committed suicide. During a shootout at a supermarket in the town, two policemen who were in pursuit of the perpetrator were injured.

On behalf of the European Parliament I would like to express my deepest condolences and my solidarity with the families and all the relatives of the victims, who are innocent young students and three teachers from the school.

This tragedy takes place only six months after a similar terrible gun rampage at a school in Kauhajoki in Finland. As responsible politicians in the European Union and in all the Member States, it is our task to do everything we possibly can to ensure that acts like this are anticipated at an early stage and prevented from occurring, if this is something that we can influence.

We are also shocked by another tragic event in the state of Alabama in the United States, where a gunman on the rampage shot at least ten people before turning his gun on himself.

I would like once again to express on behalf of everyone here our deepest sympathy and our solidarity with the victims and their families. I would be grateful if you would take time to remember those who have been killed.

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

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

Vice-President

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

10. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

11. State of play of SIS II (debate)

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

- the oral question to the Council on the state of play of SIS II, by Mr Coelho, 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, and Mr Lax, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (O-0005/2009 – B6-0010/2009), and

- the oral question to the Commission on the state of play of SIS II, by Mr Coelho, 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, and Mr Lax, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (O-0006/2009 – B6-0011/2009).

Carlos Coelho, author. – (PT) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, in the European Parliament we clearly support the rapid entry into operation of the SIS II (Schengen Information System), which should have occurred in 2007. The second generation of the SIS represents a Community approach to the need to step up security at the external borders and share important innovations such as biometric data and the interlinking of alerts. We accept that this system can only enter into operation once it is robust and can operate fully 24 hours a day. In my opinion, the time has come to find out who is responsible for this delay, make an in-depth assessment of the situation and find solutions that will make this project technically viable and restore its already weakened credibility.

We know that various tests were carried out last year, the end result of which was negative, particularly for the operational system test. The Council and the Commission decided to set a period of four months in order to try and solve the persisting problems, albeit without any great success, as can be seen from the results achieved in December 2008 when the tests were repeated. Despite some improvements having been made, as far as we know, there are still major issues in terms of the performance and robustness of the system, loss of messages, data quality and the process of synchronising the national copies with the central system. The SIS II clearly cannot start operating until these issues have been solved. I should like to express my doubts about the ability of the contracted company to solve, in such a short period of time, all these issues which have not been solved previously during a much longer period of time. I hope that an independent audit of the project can be launched in order to find out who is responsible. I have no objections to the alternative technical scenario of the evolution of the 'SIS I for All' system to SIS II, provided that the legal framework approved for the SIS II is fully respected. At the end of March, a report assessing and comparing the two scenarios shall be presented. Parliament wants to have access to this study and to be informed about the new direction to be given to the project, in terms of both the level of confidence in the technical side and the legal implications, the new timetable and the budgetary impact. I should like to remind the Council and the Commission, particularly at this time, that greater transparency in this whole process is particularly advisable.

Martine Roure, author. – (FR) Mr President, SIS II, as we know, is a very important tool for ensuring the security of the Schengen area, especially following the enlargement to include the 10 new countries.

Since the adoption of the legal bases in 2007, not once have we had the opportunity to see a detailed report on the developments or on the technical or political problems that are said to be hindering the start-up of the system.

It was through the press that we learnt that all the tests required to launch the central system in complete safety had failed in December 2008.

We know that the Commission has tried to draw up a remedial plan to resolve the main problems, and we know that several Member States, within the Council, are already thinking of an alternative that would consist of a simple upgrade to the SIS system currently in operation.

The problem is therefore not technical, but political. This Parliament has been asked to define by codecision the architecture of SIS II which, of itself, would have ensured the security necessary for our area of freedom, security and justice. We have worked on it without losing sight of security and the protection of the fundamental rights of our citizens.

In this instance, it is the political responsibility of the European institutions, and of the Council and the Commission, in particular, that is at stake, for we believe that Parliament has acquitted itself well in relation to the citizens.

We await, now and in the future, the political reasons for this radical change of direction. This could, of course, have very serious consequences for the budget earmarked thus far for this project, beginning with the putting aside, where necessary, of the available resources, until such time as the future of the project and its legal basis have been duly defined.

Henrik Lax, *author*. – (SV) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, we in the European Parliament need to know whether the Council and the Commission still believe that SIS II will ever be up and running. Will the Commission persevere in trying to find a technical solution to the current problems? What is the way forward? As expressed in the two previous speeches, we in the European Parliament wish to be kept up to date on the problems, and this has not happened up to now.

If SIS II cannot get off the ground in its present form, is there a plan B and will such a plan B be presented? As Mrs Roure mentioned, the question of SIS II is ultimately a question of the Union's credibility when it comes to guaranteeing internal security within the EU. However, we must also remember that the same infrastructure is to be used for the visa information system, VIS. In the long term, therefore, the credibility of the Union's visa policy is also on the line, that is to say, its ability to manage relations with the surrounding world in a dignified way.

Finally, I would like to ask the Commission if it still has the full support of the Member States for this project. Are they willing to bear the costs of a project that seems as if it will never get off the ground?

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, before I address the subject of our debate today, let me start by expressing my deep condolences to relatives of the victims in the tragic incident in Baden-Württemberg today.

Now let me turn to the subject of our debate today. Firstly, we are grateful for the opportunity to have this debate. This is an important issue, as you all know well. A number of operational difficulties have led to specific problems in getting SIS II up and running.

The Presidency wishes, as you request, to be completely transparent with you about the history of and the background on this issue. Because of the negative results of the original tests on the system, further tests were conducted in November and December 2008. The final results of these operational system tests were only known in the second half of January 2009.

At their informal meeting of 15 January 2009 in Prague, Justice and Home Affairs Ministers were informed by the Commission that the outcome of these tests had been less than satisfactory. The ministers agreed immediately on the need to implement a new global SIS II management approach, involving Member States working together with the Commission. The new management approach will provide for closer monitoring of the project, thereby allowing for early warning of any potential difficulties. It was also agreed that measures would be taken at a subsequent JHA Council, which took place on 26 and 27 February 2009. At that meeting, the Council agreed in its conclusion to invite the Commission to keep Parliament and the Presidency of the Council fully informed about problems related to SIS II and the way forward.

This Parliament has asked whether the problems identified to date will require the system to be rebuilt. According to the information received by the Council on the status of the SIS II project, a number of problems persist. However, we understand that the view of the Commission is that all outstanding issues can be resolved without a major redesign of the SIS II application.

At its February meeting, the Council endorsed the implementation of the SIS II analysis and repair plan, which will allow for the identification of all issues and their immediate solution, as well as the evaluation of the technical architecture so as to ensure a stable and flawless SIS II system. Nevertheless, the Council also agreed that the contingency plan should be followed in case serious problems emerge which could not be resolved. As far as an alternative to SIS II is concerned, the JHA Council in February welcomed the completion of the feasibility study serving as a basis for creating a workable, alternative technical scenario for developing SIS II based on SIS I+ evolution as a part of the contingency plan.

The Council also requested that as soon as possible, and by May 2009 at the latest, a report containing an in-depth assessment and comparison of both scenarios should be submitted to the Council by the Presidency and the Commission. The Council will assess, on the basis of this report, the progress made on SIS II development and, as far as the alternative scenario is concerned, will examine the prospect of achieving the objective of SIS II as set out in the legal framework governing the establishment, operation and use of SIS II,

on the technical basis of SIS I+ evolution. This examination will be carried out as soon as possible and at the latest by the Council meeting on 4 and 5 June 2009.

As to the details requested by Parliament on the resolution of the outstanding problems and, in particular, the financial aspects, the Council invited the Commission not only to inform the European Parliament about the problems related to SIS II, but also to inform both Parliament and the Council fully and on a regular basis about the expenditure figures related to the central SIS II project and to measures taken to ensure complete financial transparency.

On the basis of the report requested from the Presidency and Commission, the Council will, at the latest by its meeting in June 2009, discuss the calendar for entry into operation of SIS II. This will take into account the provisions on time schedules set out in Parliament's resolution of 24 September 2008 on the draft Council regulation on immigration from the Schengen Information System – SIS I+ – to the second-generation Schengen Information System – SIS II. This was incorporated into Article 19 of the Council Regulation of 24 October.

I am sure that the Commission will be able to provide some additional information in response to the questions raised. I would simply like to assure you, the Members of this Parliament, that the Presidency will follow this issue closely and ensure that the way forward agreed last month by JHA ministers is strictly respected.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, I wish to confirm what Mr Vondra has said. I must also add that, together with Mr Langer, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Interior, we have made an absolute priority of this SIS II issue.

I am going to try, in turn, to give you some clarifications. The Commission's main contractor for developing SIS II has performed a series of operational tests on the central system running interactively with some national systems. Between November and December 2008, the results of these tests led us to conclude that the central system had not achieved the level stipulated in the contract.

In mid-November, the Commission initiated a detailed analysis of the SIS II solution, which is currently being developed by Hewlett-Packard/Steria, in cooperation with experts from the Member States, and with the help and assistance of two well-known IT consultancies.

Following the failure of the operational tests, we then implemented an analysis and repair plan that will take an estimated four months to complete. The objective of this plan is to bring the implementation of SIS II up to a satisfactory level of stability and performance.

The aim of the plan is, firstly, to fix the known bugs linked to the central system – some of the bugs have already been fixed – and, secondly, to verify that the implementation of SIS II is not suffering from insurmountable structural weaknesses.

Targeted tests are being performed in a number of priority areas to remove the uncertainties surrounding the architecture of the current solution. This activity is running in parallel with the finalisation of the technical analysis of the underlying problems.

The Commission has also introduced a global approach to the management of the project so that the central and national components of SIS II can be better integrated, in accordance with the competences legally established by the Commission and the Member States.

In concrete terms, the Commission is coordinating a joint management structure for the project. This joint management structure brings together the national project managers, the central project managers and the Commission's contractors. This structure will accompany the project throughout the analysis and repair phase, then during the qualification tests, then during the migration phase, until SIS II is commissioned.

At the end of the analysis and repair phase, we will have a precise idea of the resources that still need to be implemented before SIS II can be started up and of the corresponding schedule, as Mr Vondra just said. Obviously, there is no doubt that the objective of bringing SIS II into service in September 2009 will be subject to delay.

The current difficulties facing SIS II were discussed at the informal meeting of the ministers on 15 January and at the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 26 and 27 February. The broad outlines of the approach recommended by the Commission for the continuation of SIS II were accepted.

Firstly, the need to continue with the feasibility study into an alternative technical solution based on the current SIS I+ received support from the Council. We are therefore able to continue this feasibility study into an alternative solution.

However, any alternative technical solution will obviously have to comply with the legal framework created for SIS II, as adopted by Parliament and by the Council. Obviously, great care will need to be taken with regard to the maximum re-use of the investments, as well as to the situation of the Member States and associated countries that intend to become a part of the Schengen area in the years to come.

The ministers decided to re-convene, as has just been said, in June at the latest – at the start of June – in order to assess the progress made and to define, where necessary, new directions and any changeover to an alternative option. In the light of this, the Council has asked the Presidency and the Commission, in close cooperation with the SIS II Task Force and in consultation with the appropriate bodies, to present the Council with a report containing a detailed assessment and comparison of the two scenarios. This report is to be produced as soon as possible, and by no later than May 2009.

To this end, common comparison criteria have been agreed on for the purposes of assessing the respective advantages and disadvantages of each solution. For clarity's sake, this means that we will have a Council decision at the start of June. The latter will be taken in light of the tests that will have been completed and this, we believe, will make it possible either to carry on with SIS II or to move towards an alternative solution, but one that will, of course, still fulfil the objectives that you have set.

I am, of course, very aware of what Mr Coelho and Mrs Roure said about the need for a high level of transparency. I would like to say that we send, and will continue to send, the minutes of the SIS II committee on a very regular basis. I must also say that I have written to Mr Deprez, the chairman of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, to provide him with detailed information on the situation with SIS II. A copy of this correspondence has also been sent to Mr Coelho.

I also wish to say to Mr Lax that the problems with SIS II do not affect VIS. The problems with SIS II do not involve the infrastructure that it shares with VIS. It can be said that VIS is going very much according to the plan agreed with the Member States.

What I wish to say to you is that we have in fact organised, both with the Task Force and within the Commission, extremely regular meetings with the co-contractor and the two co-contractors, especially Steria. We can truly hope, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, that this issue will be concluded in the coming months, with this decision on a final date, set as the start of June, when the Council will, in fact, have to make its decision.

I undertake here and now to keep Parliament abreast of all of these developments.

Marian-Jean Marinescu, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (RO) The operational problem with the Schengen Information System II was discussed recently as part of the Council meeting in February 2009. It was highlighted once again that an immediate solution needs to be found to the impasse which SIS II is currently at.

However, I get the impression that instead of answers, there are even more questions raised after the discussions about SIS II. The Council supports the implementation of an analysis and repairs plan to help identify the problems with SIS II's technical architecture, with the aim of making it stable and reliable. On the other hand, the Council does not exclude the possibility of deciding to adopt an alternative technical solution which can achieve the objectives proposed by SIS II.

Whichever of the options is applied, it must not have repercussions on the schedule for the inclusion of the countries which are still excluded from the Schengen area. I would like to know what measures the Commission will adopt to avoid any possible delay and how the additional costs incurred by these changes will be covered. The example of Romania speaks for itself. Romania's external border is 2 000 km long. Its integration into the Schengen area scheduled for March 2011 is a major priority. All this indecision may have consequences in terms of meeting this deadline.

I would like to mention one other thing. At a time when the Commission is preparing to draft a new legislative proposal on the next stages in border management, I would ask the Commission to evaluate first of all the effectiveness of the current systems used to manage borders in order to achieve the best synergy between these systems, and then assess the opportunity for investments in border logistics.

In order to achieve the EU's strategic objectives, the Commission should not start developing new tools from scratch until the existing ones, such as SIS II or VIS, are fully operational and reliable.

Genowefa Grabowska, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (PL) Mr President, the situation we are discussing is an eloquent example which shows that it is sometimes easier to achieve a consensus and gain political agreement on the opening of borders than it is to overcome technical problems.

The entry of new Member States to Schengen on 23 December 2007 was a great event for the citizens of those states. I know this, because I am from Poland. My country availed itself of this blessing and very much values the opening of the borders, because it meant the disappearance of the last discriminating circumstance which divided us from the Member States of the old European Union.

Also, it is in my country that the Frontex agency is based. I know that Mr Barrot has been to Poland, where he held talks in Frontex and also visited the part of the EU's external border for which Poland is responsible. I know that in practice, there are no serious problems with guarding this border, and that it is secure. However, we do have problems with technical matters, the solution of which is growing into a political problem, as my colleague Mrs Roure said. I fully agree with her.

If, however, there are technical problems, if there are difficulties, then I suppose every EU institution has a responsibility to address the body which took so long to implement SIS II. It is a pity this has not been done and that transparency in this material has been a little forced.

I think that wherever the resolution of problems which are important for citizens is concerned, the European Parliament cannot agree that any actions should be taken independently of it, or that it should be ignored, especially in the case of a matter of security.

I should like to close with a very small remark. If there were problems, if Hewlett-Packard did not manage to surmount the technical problems, it should be remembered that we have splendid specialists in Poland, young people who are wonderful IT engineers, and who are renowned the world over. I think they could be useful, and could produce the desired result significantly cheaper, faster and better.

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, Schengen is, and always has been, synonymous with the link between security on the one hand and freedom and liberality on the other. For the citizens of Europe and for all of us, this has been part of the added value offered by the European Union. It has always worked very well and has been applied effectively in the interim on a 'one for all' basis.

What is happening now is annoying. However, it is also annoying that Parliament, which has always been very cooperative, has not been given the necessary information. We have always kept the citizens of Europe informed. The Schengen Information System II will be functioning perfectly and on schedule and now we find out that problems have arisen and that there does not seem to be an end in sight to the dilemma.

I would be interested to know whether the figures circulating in the media, which indicate that around EUR 100 million has so far been spent on developing the Schengen Information System II, are correct. Will the company suffer the consequences? Why has the Commission, the Council or another body not introduced a system of checks in good time?

Mihael Brejc (PPE-DE). – (SL) Actually, it is strange that issues concerning the system's operability should crop up time and again whenever we tackle these kinds of major and weighty technical questions. We have, by now, already dealt with the technical issues connected with data processing. This is why the public is justifiably asking why it is that we have no professional institutions at an EU level which are sufficiently competent to address any technical problems that might arise from the operation of exceptionally large and comprehensive databases.

I have participated in these debates from the very beginning. I have also worked together with the rapporteur, Mr Coelho, and am aware of certain technical difficulties and deficiencies that still remain, including those involving the level of expertise available. Therefore, my feeling here is that we need to carry out a genuine technical and financial review of the system and take to task those who have been managing this project. In fact, this is not just my feeling; it is the feeling of the public at large.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, I hold you personally in high esteem, but what is happening here really is an intolerable mess, involving an unacceptable degree of waste and

incompetence. For this reason, I call not only on the Commission but also on the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Budgetary Control to look in detail at this question.

I am pleased that the Czech Republic holds the Council Presidency because Bavaria and the Czech Republic have exactly the same security interests. We know that, despite all the fears relating to the opening of the borders, the security situation has been considerably and fundamentally improved since the borders were opened, as a result of excellent police cooperation. This could be a model for other parts of Europe and I would like to thank the Czech Republic for this on behalf of Bavaria. We expect that the Schengen Information System will eventually cover all areas and that it will not be restricted to individual, exemplary, bilateral arrangements.

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I would like to thank you for this debate. I think it shows that there is a problem which needs to be fixed. The Council, under our leadership, did what it could in January. It took seriously this initiative to build the contingency or alternative plan and to push for a solution by setting the deadlines.

That is what we can do. As regards the financial issues, I shall leave the floor to the Commission to respond. We now have excellent cooperation between Minister Langer and Commissioner Barrot, so we believe that we will be able to deal with that.

Concerning the question of whether this is a political or a technical problem, we believe that this is just a technical problem. It is not a smokescreen, as has been suggested, to cover some political problems. No – the system must be operational as soon as possible.

Regarding the comments by Mrs Grabowska: yes, we remember what it means to be in the waiting room. We were discussing this a year ago. All the countries that are interested in seeing some progress here are suddenly sharing experiences similar to ours. We are committed to setting out a technical solution which will allow participation by industries of additional countries, in accordance with the particular calendar.

I shall limit myself to these few concluding remarks. I said a lot at the beginning. Now we will move on.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Vondra, thank you for the Czech Presidency's commitment to this issue. Your support has been much appreciated.

I should first of all like to reply to Mr Marinescu by saying that there is no particular problem, given that the Member States that are not yet members of Schengen will be able to join in the SIS II system too. We shall have several 'slots', or times, when new Member States that are not Schengen members will be able to join in SIS II, and so, all being well, there should not be any particular problems.

Mrs Grabowska, I must thank you also for all that the Republic of Poland is doing to guard the external borders. I have had the opportunity to observe, in fact, the quality of the work carried out by Frontex with the Polish teams on the Ukrainian border.

I should simply like to say, in response to Mrs Roure and Mrs Grabowska, that the problem is basically a technical one. It is not, as Mr Vondra said, a political problem. The truth is, quite simply, that the Member States, or some Member States, have made greater and greater demands. Therefore, it has to be said, SIS II has had to meet increasingly sophisticated objectives. Consequently, the system has become more complex and, despite all the tributes you have paid to information technology, the implementation has turned out to be more difficult than expected. Nonetheless, it is true that the problem remains essentially a technical one and that it should therefore be able to be resolved.

I should like to say to Mr Pirker that Parliament will be kept well informed, and I hereby undertake to do this. I have personally taken this on during the course of this project, and I think I can say that I truly consider it to be an absolute priority. I wish also to reassure Mr Brejc that we have clearly identified those in charge. Working with the Commission, we have set up this Task Force, in which the Member States are closely involved. I think that we now have a definite steering group, but our co-contractor also has to be able to meet the requirements we have set.

I should also like to reply to the financial question posed by Mr Pirker and Mr Posselt just now. The Commission's total budget commitment for the SIS II project amounts to about EUR 68 million. The corresponding contracts include feasibility studies, development of the actual central system, support and quality control, the s-Testa network, preparation for operational management in Strasbourg, security,

preparations in relation to biometric matters, and communication. That, then, is the commitment: EUR 68 million.

As far as payments are concerned, EUR 27 million have actually been spent to date on technical development: EUR 20 million on developing the system; EUR 7 million on providing a network that is at the forefront of technical progress; and EUR 4 500 000 on quality assurance.

It has to be said that if, after gaining a clear idea of the reliability or lack of reliability of SIS II, the Council decided to move over to the SIS I+R formula, we could at that point consider reusing the communication network put in place for SIS II, meaning that the corresponding investments could, for the most part, be preserved.

Our real problem, ladies and gentlemen, is equipping Schengen, the Schengen area of free movement, with a genuinely effective tool. It is true that, if we succeed with Schengen II, it will be the most effective system in the world, given the results it will enable us to achieve. The information technology, however, has to be in place.

Anyway, what I should like to say to you, after the Czech Presidency – and once again I am grateful to Mr Vondra for the Czech Presidency's commitment to this difficult issue – is that I truly believe that, together with the current Presidency, we have made every effort to avoid any further delay and to genuinely enable our co-contractor to meet our expectations. In any case, we shall have a definite date fixed to enable the Council to take the necessary decisions. Once again, I do, of course, undertake to keep Parliament informed.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Alin Lucian Antochi (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I believe that this project aimed at improving the mechanism for managing the European Union's external borders should not be regarded as an attempt to halt migration as a process. The real purpose of the measures for making EU borders more secure is nothing at all to do with stemming the influx of immigrants, but is about tightly controlling them. Proper migration management is beneficial to the European Union Member States' societies and economies.

I must emphasise that the European Union should focus more attention on the management of its peripheral borders where there are conflict zones. For instance, the activities carried out until now by the European Union Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) are worthy of particular recognition. These include establishing a single customs procedure at the border, setting up barriers against smuggling and reducing the activities of criminal groups.

On the other hand, the failure to resolve so far the Transnistria conflict makes it fairly difficult for the Moldovan authorities to manage this section of the border, where there continues to be a large flow of illegal migration.

I would like to express my firm belief that the European Union has sufficient political, economic and security leverage to stop the illegal actions mentioned above, which also means getting more actively involved in settling the unresolved conflicts at its eastern external borders.

12. Croatia: progress report 2008 - Turkey: progress report 2008 - Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: progress report 2008 (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and the Commission statements on:

- Croatia: progress report 2008,
- Turkey: progress report 2008, and
- Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: progress report 2008.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – Mr President, let me introduce the debate on the progress reports on the three countries Croatia, Turkey and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Let me begin with Croatia. Your report rightly states that Croatia made good progress over the past year. Since the start of the negotiations, 22 chapters – out of 35 – have been opened, of which seven have been

provisionally closed. The Presidency will continue to take forward the negotiations. Two accession conferences in particular are planned: at deputy level in the coming weeks, and at ministerial level in June.

Your report rightly highlights the importance of reaching a settlement to the outstanding border dispute with Slovenia. I would like to assure this Parliament that the Presidency will continue to make every effort to help resolve this issue and, in this context, we fully support the ongoing efforts of the Commissioner, Olli Rehn, to find a solution to allow us to continue with the accession negotiations. We had a lunch just before the sitting to discuss this in depth. Concerning the last development, we welcome Croatia's decision announced on Monday that it accepts the mediation proposed by the group of experts proposed by Olli Rehn. We are encouraging both Slovenia and Croatia to work constructively in order to find a permanent and mutually acceptable solution as a matter of urgency, because it should not be just a prescription for more delays.

Apart from this important issue, further progress in the wider negotiations depends, above all, on Croatia itself. The necessary political, economic, legislative and administrative reforms have to be completed, and it has to meet its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. The implementation of the revised Accession Partnership is also important in preparing for further integration within the European Union. The Council considers that the indicative and conditional road map drawn up by the Commission in its 2008 Progress Report is a useful tool. It will assist Croatia in taking the necessary steps to reach the final stage of the negotiations. That said, despite good progress, much remains to be done.

Let me pick out some of the key areas where further progress is needed, beginning with judicial reform. The EU has made it very clear that the establishment of an independent, impartial, reliable, transparent and efficient judicial system is essential. It is a condition for strengthening the rule of law and the proper implementation of the *acquis*. A professional, accountable, transparent and independent public administration is also key. Significant legislative reforms have been achieved in these two areas, but we need to see how they will work in practice.

The same is true of the fight against corruption and organised crime, as outlined in your report. The powers and resources of the Office for the Prevention of Corruption and Organised Crime have been strengthened. This is also the case with the criminal courts investigating cases in this area. The main issue now is to make sure that the expected results are delivered. The full implementation of the anti-corruption programme and action plan is key to addressing this serious problem.

The Union has also underlined that full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), including access to documents, is essential. We are following very closely developments in this area and we invite the Croatian authorities to ensure that full cooperation with ICTY is maintained. We welcome the recent agreement concerning the missing documents and urge Croatia to deliver on it.

On refugee return, we note that the implementation of the convalidation decision for validating pension rights has begun and information on the changes to the rules has been made available to the returnee community.

On housing care, the 2007 cases have been resolved, but the 2008 benchmark has not yet been met. Work on ensuring the sustainability of refugee return must continue. This also goes for legislation to improve the rights of minorities.

You have rightly highlighted the issue of regional cooperation in your report. Efforts to improve good neighbourly relations must continue.

Let me now turn to the issue of Turkey. Negotiations with Turkey continued during 2008, and a total of four chapters – as is almost a tradition – were opened during the course of the year.

Despite the EU's encouragement to Turkey to step up its reform efforts, 2008 did not deliver the expected level of reform. Further work on the political criteria remains key. Significant efforts will be needed in a number of areas, as highlighted by the Council in its conclusions of 8 December 2008 and in the Commission's 2008 progress report. This is an issue to which you have also drawn attention in your report.

At the same time, the Presidency welcomes the recent positive steps undertaken by Turkey, including the recently adopted national programme for the adoption of the *acquis* and the appointment of the new chief negotiator. It is important that these commitments are now translated into real and tangible actions.

We would like to take this opportunity to stress the strategic importance of Turkey. The Presidency shares the opinion of Parliament that Turkey needs to be commended for the progress achieved in the field of

energy. We continue to assess ways forward in this crucial area, particularly in terms of full support to the Nabucco pipeline project.

As far as Turkey's progress to accession is concerned, we would like to highlight that progress in the area of freedom of expression is essential for overall progress in the negotiations. Besides the welcome amendments to Article 301 of the Criminal Code, which have had a positive effect, there are still a number of legal provisions that remain in place which could lead to restrictions in this area. Website bans, often disproportionate in scope and duration, remain a cause for concern. Adequate legal solutions are also required to ensure that religious pluralism is brought in line with European standards.

A comprehensive anti-corruption strategy needs to be developed. We are concerned also at the increased number of reported cases of torture and ill-treatment, in particular, outside official places of detention. The law on the duties and legal powers of the police, amended in 2007, must be monitored closely in order to prevent violations of human rights. The ratification of the Protocol to the Convention against Torture is vital.

As far as the south-east is concerned, we welcome the announcement of the guidelines and general content of the South-East Anatolia Project. We now await concrete steps leading to the economic, social and cultural development of the region. This must include addressing longstanding issues such as the return of internally displaced persons or the question of village guards.

As far as EU-Turkey relations are concerned, it is clear that Turkey needs to fulfil its obligation of full, non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol. This is an important issue, as highlighted in your report, and should be addressed as soon as possible, as it clearly affects the pace of the accession negotiations. Issues covered by the declaration of 21 September 2005 will continue to be followed up, and progress is urgently awaited.

Furthermore, Turkey also needs to commit itself unequivocally to good neighbourly relations and to the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Despite all these difficulties, progress continues in a range of areas. Work is currently under way on Chapter 16 on taxation and Chapter 19 on social policy and employment. Despite the fact that negotiations are becoming more complex as they advance, the Czech Presidency is committed to making progress on those chapters where progress is really possible. Moreover, the Presidency puts emphasis on achieving progress in Chapter 15 on energy, in compliance with energy issues, because it is one of our priorities.

Finally, let me turn to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is a dynamic country with considerable potential. At the same time, it faces a number of significant challenges. Both these points are brought out admirably in your report. There is indeed much in the report with which the Council is in agreement.

Your report places considerable emphasis on the question of a date for the opening of accession negotiations. You also rightly highlight the wish of all sides to find an early and mutually acceptable solution to the issue of the name.

As far as recent developments are concerned, the early elections in June 2008 were held in several stages following significant problems both during the run-up, and on the original election day on 1 June. The OSCE/ODIHR/Council of Europe noted that there was a 'failure to prevent violent acts' in the run-up to the elections, and that the elections did not live up to a number of key international standards.

As a result, we underlined to the government and all political players the importance of addressing these core points in the run-up to the presidential and local elections due in a few days time. It is our impression that this message has been heard and that significant efforts are being taken to prevent any disruption. We shall see whether these efforts bear fruit.

The Commission's 2008 Progress Report is helpful. We have taken note of the blueprint drawn up by the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is a detailed text which represents a serious effort to take on board the Commission's recommendations. Against the background of the region as a whole, the document and the work that has gone into it should be viewed positively.

The internal cohesion of this multiethnic state is, of course, key to its future development. I would, therefore, like to endorse the importance which this Parliament attaches to the Ohrid Framework Agreement. This has been pivotal in drawing the country back from conflict and in assisting in its path towards greater European integration.

On visa liberalisation, we are currently at an evaluation stage, and I would not wish to prejudge the outcome. On a personal basis, I would simply say that I have much sympathy for the hopes and aspirations of ordinary citizens of the former Yugoslavia who would like to be able to travel freely again. But the essential precondition remains the preparedness of the country to fulfil the specific criteria set out in the visa liberalisation road map. Personally, I hope that positive developments can be achieved soon.

This brings me to one of the key points in your report and resolution. The Czech Presidency is fully committed to the European perspective for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Further progress in this direction is achievable. But the key objectives of the Association Partnership have to be fulfilled and we need evidence of well-conducted elections, in contrast to what happened in 2008. These points will be evaluated by the Commission in its next progress report. We look forward to this report, and to further developments in Skopje.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

Olli Rehn, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, today's debate provides a very good opportunity to review the accession process in the three candidate countries.

Let me start with Croatia. Mr Swoboda's draft resolution addresses the main challenges which face Croatia today. I fully agree with Deputy Prime Minister Vondra that the accession negotiations with Croatia have generally been going well since they started in October 2005, and that is why, in November 2008, the Commission proposed an indicative road map for reaching the final stage of accession negotiations by the end of 2009, provided Croatia fulfils the necessary conditions.

On this too, I share the analysis of your rapporteur and Mr Vondra as regards the future challenges such as judicial reform, the fight against organised crime and corruption, and reform of the ship-building sector and bringing it into line with our state aid regime and competition policy.

Unfortunately, the accession negotiations with Croatia are currently stalled because of the border issue. We have worked with the Czech Presidency on this matter, and I very much appreciate the support of the Presidency in our efforts to find a viable way forward.

Although this is a bilateral issue, it has become a European problem, and the Commission therefore took the initiative to offer European facilitation to solve the border issue and allow Croatia's accession negotiations to continue, assuming that both sides found such facilitation useful.

That was the message I took to both Ljubljana and Zagreb in January. I have since then been discussing the terms of such facilitation with both foreign ministers – most recently in a trilateral meeting yesterday evening – following the decisions of both governments on our initiative.

I welcome the endorsement in principle from both countries on such European facilitation, which would be provided by a senior expert group chaired by President Martti Ahtisaari. During our talks yesterday, we explored the possibilities for agreeing on the specific terms of facilitation. We agreed to continue the talks in the near future. Hence, this is still work in progress.

Let me point out that, in its efforts, the Commission has relied on the negotiating framework, which is the very foundation of the EU accession process for Croatia, agreed by Croatia and all the EU Member States, including Slovenia.

By adopting and agreeing the negotiating framework, both Croatia and Slovenia agreed to resolve any border dispute in line with the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter. The UN Charter states, and I quote, because this is of particular importance: 'The parties to any dispute [...] shall [...] seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice'.

There are two equally important conclusions to this statement in the UN Charter. First, the parties can choose any one of the methods outlined in the UN Charter. The Commission's initiative is, without doubt, among these methods.

Second, whatever method in the UN Charter they agree to choose, they have to agree between the two of them. I sincerely hope that this will happen sooner, rather than later. The Commission's initiative provides a very solid basis for this, and a viable way forward.

To sum up, the Commission's objective is indeed to solve the border issue and, in parallel, to unblock the EU accession negotiations of Croatia so that Croatia is able to meet its target timeline of concluding the technical negotiations by the end of 2009.

I welcome Ms Oomen-Ruijten's carefully balanced resolution on Turkey, and support the Presidency's efforts to open chapters which are technically ready to be opened. We have unfortunately witnessed a certain slow-down of political reforms in Turkey in recent years. However – and I agree with your rapporteur on this – since the end of last year and the beginning of this year, there have been certain positive developments, such as the launch of a new television channel broadcasting in Kurdish and the establishment of a parliamentary committee on gender equality. Moreover, the new 'National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis' and the appointment of a new full-time chief negotiator are also steps forward.

I am also encouraged by the fact that Prime Minister Erdogan and the leader of the main opposition party, Deniz Baykal, signalled their commitment to Turkey's EU accession process during their recent visits to Brussels. I hope these developments will result in a strong political and societal consensus to pursue EU reforms with renewed vigour and energy.

This is connected with freedom of expression, which is a core European value. An open and transparent relation between the press and public authorities is indeed elementary to the quality of the democratic debate in any country. This is particularly true for a country like Turkey which is going through a difficult process of transformation and reform. The Commission is therefore very closely following the ensured existence of press freedom in Turkey. It should be genuinely respected, as it is the very foundation of any open society, and thus of the continued democratic transformation of Turkey.

I shall say a few words on Cyprus. There is a unique chance this year to reunite the island and bring to an end this long-standing conflict on European soil. It is essential that Turkey proactively support the ongoing settlement talks between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus.

Concerning the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, I thank Mr Meijer and the shadow rapporteurs for a well-balanced resolution. I share their regret that, three years after the country achieved candidate status, accession negotiations have not yet started.

The key outstanding condition is the ability to meet international standards for the conduct of free and fair elections. This is a core requirement for compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria, and the presidential and municipal elections in March and April will therefore be a moment of truth.

I share the positive assessment in your draft resolution on the progress made by Skopje in implementing the road map towards visa liberalisation. The Commission remains committed to making a proposal to the Council on visa-free travel in 2009, once the conditions have been met by each country in the region. I know how important this is for the ordinary citizens of the Western Balkans.

I shall summarise by saying that, for the sake of stability and peace, liberty and democracy, we shall continue our work for a gradual, managed accession of the three candidate countries, despite the very challenging economic times. I trust that Parliament will also continue to support this very valuable common goal.

Hannes Swoboda, *author*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, I would like to speak first and mainly about Croatia. Croatia has made progress in a number of areas. I am very grateful for the efforts which have been made in Croatia itself, in particular, with regard to judicial reform. A number of steps were needed and, as a result of the appointment of two new ministers, some things have been put in motion. I know that ministers cannot do everything, but significant progress has been made on combating corruption and cross-border crime.

Secondly, as far as the question of cooperation with the International Criminal Court is concerned, I would like to state clearly that I expect Croatia to take all the necessary steps in this respect. There have been disputes about different chains of command and the corresponding documents. I hope that these issues will be resolved in the near future so that they do not cause interruptions or delays in the negotiations.

Thirdly, Croatia has also made some moves towards economic reform. I am very pleased about the plans in this area, particularly relating to the shipping industry. It has not been easy, but the important foundations have been laid. I am also happy that agreements could be reached with workers in the shipping industry. These reforms will be painful, but they are necessary and they can be made in a sensible form.

I come now to the main question, which is always controversial, concerning border disputes. Commissioner, unfortunately I must tell you that I am rather disappointed that you have addressed this issue without making contact with Parliament. I have sent you the documents and you have failed to respond. We would probably have made more progress if you had handled these issues with more sensitivity. In order to ensure that no misunderstandings arise, I fully support your proposal for mediation. However, we could have moved further forward if a clear statement had been made in advance on the question of the importance of international law rather than afterwards.

We are in a difficult situation. It is clear that movement is needed on both sides. The wording of your original proposal was not ideal. I would have preferred you to be in closer contact with Parliament and with the rapporteur. This would perhaps have allowed us to achieve more by working together. Unfortunately that was not the case, but that is not what lies at the heart of this debate. The key issue of the debate is how we can make progress.

We will make progress. This is likely to be the wording which I will propose to Parliament tomorrow. We will say that the mediation that you have proposed – that is how it is and I fully support it – should be based on international law, including the principles of equity. The two sides must agree to move in this direction. Both Croatia and Slovenia must recognise that international law is necessary but, of course, also that the principles of equity, fairness and a just solution – a political solution, if you want to describe it in that way – are essential. Both sides must acknowledge this and it is actually rather sad that we are in a situation where we cannot progress. Given the other problems which there are in the world and, in particular, in Europe, it should be possible to solve these problems by mutual agreement. Despite all the criticism, I do, of course, wish you every success in your efforts to convince both sides. Unfortunately, yesterday's discussion was not as positive as it should have been, but I hope that will soon change.

I would like to make one more general remark which also applies to Macedonia. There are bilateral problems, but they should not be allowed to block the negotiations on enlargement. As regards our amendment, which is often misunderstood, it is, of course, the case that bilateral problems should not form part of the negotiation framework. They must remain outside the framework. This is all about the negotiations between the European Union and the individual countries. The bilateral problems must be resolved in parallel, if both sides – in this case Macedonia and Greece – are prepared to consider the issues. This Parliament must give a clear signal that both sides in all these disputes must be prepared to move. It is not possible for one side to compromise and the other to remain in the same position. We must make it clear in all these cases that the bilateral problems must not be allowed to block the accession negotiations. They can be resolved in parallel with the negotiations and this Parliament will help to ensure that both sides make a move in the two disputes which we are discussing here. I hope that we will then achieve positive results.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten, author. – (NL) Mr President, I should like to start by conveying my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has contributed to this report. I have submitted a critical, yet fair, assessment of the progress which Turkey made in 2008. It is a report that contains many points, holds up a mirror for Turkey and only sends out one clear message, namely that for the third year running, too little has been done in the way of political reform.

Political reform and meeting the Copenhagen criteria are absolute priorities. This is not about opening chapters. This is about what unites European citizens, the rule of law, independent and impartial justice, the freedom of speech, a well-functioning press and an individual civil right for each citizen. Mr President, more must be done in those areas. Only then can political chapters be opened.

Mr President, Turkey should not prescribe these political criteria on our behalf. The Turkish Government told its own citizens when it took office that it is necessary to modernise Turkey. For this purpose, the political criteria need to be reformed, because in order to create a socially-oriented market economy, people must be given the opportunity to experience their creativity and all citizens must enjoy the same rights. This is why the political criteria are now central in our report.

When I, along with the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), and everyone else, visited Turkey, I got the feeling that something was shifting and could see a little light at the end of the tunnel, as Commissioner Rehn commented before. Ten years ago, I could not have imagined that there would be television programmes in Kurdish. This, too, has been included in the report. Moreover, I very much appreciate Turkey's positive role in the Caucasus. I have expressed my appreciation for the first steps in the direction of opening up the borders with the Armenians, because they too need to be released from the isolation they are currently facing.

Mr President, a national programme has been approved to carry out those reforms. These are all positive elements, and I sincerely hope that Turkey will now apply itself to addressing these reforms with the new negotiator. A modern and prosperous Turkey is of the utmost importance to the Turkish people, but – and I say this in every Member State – certainly also of major importance to us all in the European Union.

I should like to make a few more points, Mr President. We frequently receive reports that the freedom of the media and press leave something to be desired and that the press, when it exercises its freedoms, is subsequently faced with fiscal assessments or other measures. This needs to change.

Finally, on the subject of the amendments that have been tabled, I should like to counsel the Socialist Group in the European Parliament against them, to accept the report as it is before us. We acknowledge that improvements need to be made, but we should not make additional requests, as these are unnecessary and will only lead to polarisation in this House.

Erik Meijer, *author*. – (NL) Mr President, EU enlargement is, at the moment, far less of a priority than in the years leading up to the major enlargement waves of 2004 and 2007. Public opinion in the existing Member States is far less positive about this now. This is, to a large extent, attributable to the differences in prosperity and to the level of salaries, differences that can lead to more labour migration from poorer to richer Member States.

Similarly, the problem of visa requirements reviled in the countries of former Yugoslavia is very much related to this fear. As a result, many residents of those countries who gained easy access to the present EU Member States until 1992 are now finding it difficult to visit our countries. This needs to change.

When candidate countries try their best to become fully-fledged members of the European Union as quickly as possible, they can make mistakes in the process. For this exact purpose, Macedonia passed new legislation in 2008 at break-neck speed, that now turns out to be inconsistent with our prevailing views on careful democratic decision making.

The opposition, along with various non-governmental organisations and individual citizens, have complained about careless governance in different cases. In their view, the largest governing party takes more liberties than what befits a pluriform society, in which democracy is about more than just holding elections. Criticism has been levelled at the police for failing to register complaints lodged by the public. There is indignation about the demonstrative arrest of the mayor of the City of Strumitsa and of other politicians.

I suggest we do not sweep these points of criticism under the carpet when we adopt the resolution tomorrow. There is every reason to speak out openly that not all is well yet, not by a long shot. Nevertheless, we have to recognise that Macedonia is no worse off than other states during their accession negotiations and even sometimes after their accession. If the accession negotiations with Macedonia get underway now, it will not be until 2017 at least when that country can join.

A year ago, Parliament endorsed my proposal to start these negotiations as quickly as possible. Subsequently, the disruption of the parliamentary elections became an argument to wait for the presidential and local council elections that are to be held soon. A further delay in the process brings with it two major drawbacks: the broad support within Macedonia for EU membership will crumble away, and the status of the candidate country will thus lose all meaning in future.

Everyone knows that using the name Macedonia without any prefixes will meet with insuperable objections from Greece. For Greece, this neighbouring state is North Macedonia, High Macedonia, Vardar Macedonia or Skopje Macedonia. This is a considerably more positive attitude than that prior to 2006, in which Greece wanted to avoid any use of the name Macedonia for its neighbours to the north.

It is precisely in Greece's interest, much more so than the other Member States, for this northern neighbour to join the European Union as quickly as possible. For this reason, a solution must be agreed by both states at the earliest opportunity. The alternative is that both states continue to wait until the other state makes the first major concession, but this other state cannot be the only party to run diametrically counter to public opinion at home.

We must steer clear from a situation in which referendums will decide that compromises cannot be struck with the neighbour. As long as no compromise has been reached, my successors will be reporting each year for decades to come that progress is not possible.

Finally, the other bilateral difference of opinion between Slovenia and Croatia should also be resolved promptly. In 2011, Croatia must be able to be a fully-fledged Member State. State support for the shipbuilding sector should not prove a hindrance if other Member States are allowed to give state support to their banks or their automotive industries. It should be possible to maintain the level of employment in Pula, Rijeka and Split.

Bernd Posselt, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, in this enlargement debate, we must correct three important mistakes. Firstly, Turkey is not a European country, but forms part of Asia Minor. As the President-in-Office of the Council has rightly said, Turkey is a strategically important partner and therefore we need a strategic partnership and not accession to the EU.

Secondly, the problems relating to Macedonia have nothing to do with the fact that the democratic system there is allegedly not working, Commissioner. I was present at the elections and they were exemplary. There were difficulties with a tiny minority within the minority. In fact, the problems concern the dreadful name issue, which is being misused for the purposes of blackmail by both sides.

Thirdly, Croatia has been ready to join the European Union for a long time. We could have completed the negotiations this year quite easily, as the European Parliament has demanded on several occasions and will probably demand again tomorrow. The fact that we have not yet reached this point is entirely due to a blockade by Slovenia in the Council. Mr President-in-Office of the Council and Commissioner, I call on you to find a reasonable solution which will finally bring this blockade to an end. The border problem is exactly the same as when Slovenia joined. We cannot allow one country to join despite an unresolved issue and not the other.

Therefore, we need to support the Slovenes and Croats in their search for a sensible solution to the border problem but, at the same time, to open all the chapters in the negotiations. The two issues have nothing to do with one another and opening the chapters in the negotiations is a requirement for achieving a positive result this year with an excellent and exemplary accession candidate.

As far as the solution to the bilateral question is concerned, where we are offering our help, I would ask you, Commissioner, to work towards an objective arbitration process. On Monday, your spokeswoman said that this could take place on the basis of international law and jurisprudence. I would like to ask you whether you feel this wording to be suitable for a compromise to be reached between the two sides.

I would in any case like this wording to....

(The President cut off the speaker)

Jan Marinus Wiersma, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, I should like to make a few points with regard to the excellent report by Mrs Oomen-Ruijten on Turkey. My group subscribes to the main conclusion in the report, namely that too little progress has been made recently.

Admittedly, 2008 was a turbulent year for Turkish politics, and this turbulence will have stopped a few reforms from being carried out, to the extent that part of the process has ground to a halt. Now that these problems in Turkey have been resolved to some extent, we hope that the government, based on plans it has tabled, will make haste to do what is necessary to keep the negotiation process with the European Union credible. I would refer to the national programme for reforms that has been set up by the present government.

Needless to say, our group will continue to support the negotiations with Turkey, and these negotiations are, as far as we are concerned, about EU membership, even though we should not labour under any illusions as to the process and the possible duration of these. It is unacceptable, though, for the impulse to come from Turkey alone. We at the EU, too, should remain reliable partners in that process.

Turkey is of strategic importance to the European Union, not least on account of our energy supply and everything that is related to this, and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament is in favour of opening the energy chapter in the negotiation process. Eventually, though, Turkey will need to do most of the groundwork, and the Oomen-Ruijten report contains many points which we have looked at in a critical light and should continue to do so.

I should like to mention a few points from this excellent report. Freedom of speech must be guaranteed. We are still not happy with what is happening over there. Recently, there was an Internet campaign concerning Armenia and the genocide. Surely the way in which the authorities are responding to this undermines this freedom.

Something that is of paramount importance, that we also want to keep repeating and about which the European Parliament should not leave anyone in any doubt, is that we will never accept the Islamisation of Turkey, and that ultimately we will be able to admit that country only on the basis of its secular character as is now enshrined in the Constitution.

I should like to finish off with one last remark. Commissioner Rehn has spoken in somewhat optimistic terms about the negotiations in Cyprus. In my view, we should not do anything, but neither should we neglect doing anything, to secure the success of these talks, and we will also need to appeal to Turkey to do nothing that could thwart these talks, because it is important for the parties to negotiate in freedom about how they would like to shape their joint future. I can only say that I hope that the optimism displayed by Commissioner Rehn is justified.

István Szent-Iványi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (HU) At the end of last year, there were two important developments in Croatia's accession process. On the one hand, the Croatian Government took significant steps towards judicial reform, making decisive moves against organised crime and showing results in the fight against corruption. At the same time, the accession negotiations came to a halt because of the bilateral border dispute. This affects not just Croatia, ladies and gentlemen, but, more fundamentally, the credibility of the enlargement process. Such behaviour threatens that credibility, and therefore it is very important for the obstacles to be removed as soon as possible. Blocking these talks sends the very dangerous message that accession does not depend on fulfilling the conditions but on settling bilateral disputes, in which one side, in a position of strength, seeks to force its will upon the other.

We welcome Commissioner Olli Rehn's recommendation of mediation, and it is very heartening that Slovenia and Croatia responded positively. We hope that henceforth there will no longer be any reason for obstructing the subsequent accession talks. We continue to believe that it will be possible to conclude the negotiations by the end of the year, in accordance with the original timetable. For this to happen, however, further efforts are necessary. We expect Croatia to dispel all concerns about their cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague, and to turn over all the documents which the tribunal requests. This is very important. We likewise consider it important to assist in refugee return, to integrate the Roma minority and to complete the desegregation programme as well as to use EU funds effectively, since we have seen significant deficiencies in this regard. It is still possible that we can keep to the original timetable. This is our joint responsibility. We expect constructive actions on the part of Croatia as well as of the European Union, for this is not just a matter of our joint effort but of the credibility of the entire enlargement process.

Konrad Szymański, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, firstly I would like to congratulate Mrs Oomen-Ruijten, Mr Swoboda and Mr Meijer on their very solidly prepared resolutions.

As far as Turkey is concerned, the picture of our relations outlined in this document is not optimistic, but it certainly is true. I am glad that in the resolution, our expectations in the area of freedom of religion for Christian communities in Turkey have been upheld, including the right to teach, the right to train clergy, and also protection of the property of these communities. As with other matters, we are experiencing continuous and increasingly irritating delays from the Turkish side in relation to these issues.

Irrespective of the accession process, Turkey is a very promising and important partner for Europe in the areas of security and energy. The efforts of the government of Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul at improving relations with Turkey's neighbours have been the most important aspect of Turkish politics recently. It is a pity that these efforts were undermined by rash measures in relation to Israel. The attempts to link development of strategic cooperation between the EU and Turkey, which is a matter of immediate importance, with the negotiation process, the dynamics of which are slowing for objective reasons, are also disturbing. That is how I understand the Turkish statement on Nabucco. We need a more pragmatic approach here. The temptation of blackmail is a bad counsellor.

As for Croatia, we should do everything we can to maintain the tempo of the accession process, which foresees accession of Croatia to the EU in 2009. The stability of this region is still fragile. Neither border disputes nor disputes over ownership can become additional conditions for expansion in the Balkans. In the name of stabilisation in the region we should, as quickly as possible, include Croatia in the integration process, and then Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro, and perhaps Kosovo and Albania.

Joost Lagendijk, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (NL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I can be brief about the Oomen-Ruijten report. It is, all in all, a fine report that gives an accurate account of the remaining problems and where there is progress, it says so. In that respect, all credit to the rapporteur.

I would, in fact, like to seize this opportunity to take stock of five years of EU/Turkey relations in this parliamentary term. Looking back to five years ago, 2004 turned out to be the golden year of reforms that brought Turkey really closer to the EU. It is strange, and also a little sad if truth be told, that since 2004, the rate of reforms has been too slow, that, in actual fact, the EU is now less willing to give Turkey a fair chance and that in Turkey, enthusiasm for membership has waned.

All parliamentary reports published in all those years clearly state Parliament's priorities where crucial reforms are concerned. First of all, with regard to freedom of speech and opinion, even though the notorious Article 301 has been changed, the situation is still unsatisfactory. It is very unfortunate that websites, including YouTube, are still not available in Turkey, and there is unacceptable pressure from the government on parts of the media.

Secondly, concerning the Kurdish issue, there was considerable hope in 2007 that, following the accession of the Kurdish-nationalist party DTP, a solution would be found between the DTP and the AKP. This was not the case, unfortunately.

Thirdly, with regard to religious minorities, although there is a law on organisations, which offers a solution to some of the minorities, nevertheless for a large Muslim minority, the Alevites, still no solution has been found. Despite all this sluggish progress, there is still a majority in this Parliament who are in favour of accession.

In my view, the message of this debate and of the debates over the past five years to the Turkish Government should be that this support, despite inadequate reforms, will only persist if new reform proposals are made without delay in all three areas.

In this respect, I share to some extent the Commissioner's optimism about Kurdish television, about the openings that have been created between Turkey and Armenia. The will to reform from 2004 will need to return. If this happens, I am convinced that our debates and those in Turkey will once again be filled with optimism.

Adamos Adamou, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, the progress report on Turkey and its evaluation in December concern whether or not this country has complied with the Copenhagen criteria and its obligations under the Association Agreement and the Additional Protocol to the Ankara agreement.

The objective of full integration, which is important both to Turkey and the European Union, is still the driving force behind a series of reforms and changes in Turkey's policies in order to secure the rights of all minorities, find a political solution to the Kurdish question, recognise the Armenian genocide and open the border with Armenia.

Turkey needs to comply with all its contractual obligations towards the European Union, as all previous candidate countries have done. Instead, Turkey has failed to comply with the contractual obligations undertaken towards the European Union with regard to the Republic of Cyprus as a Member State. It refuses to open its ports and airports to ships and aircraft from the Republic and lift the veto on the participation of Cyprus in international organisations and, while seeking a role as a regulatory factor in the area, continues to infringe international law by occupying Cyprus.

Today we are in the middle of negotiations to resolve the Cyprus question on the basis of a two-zone, twin-community federation with political equality, as formulated in the UN resolutions under international and European law. The European Union must therefore abide by its initial positions and step up the pressure, so that Turkey allows substantial progress to be made with the negotiations, stops the occupation and takes the action needed to clarify the fate of the missing persons. We have re-tabled this issue with amendments, even though there is another resolution on the missing persons, following the recent statements by the Turkish soldier Olgkats about the execution in 1974 of 10 Greek-Cypriot prisoners who are still missing. This is a purely humanitarian issue and does not diminish in value however many times we repeat it.

As regards the energy chapter, it cannot be opened unless Turkey stops preventing the Republic of Cyprus from exercising its sovereign rights in its exclusive economic zone. I see in your own report, Commissioner, that the Commission is concerned about the harassment of vessels conducting research for hydrocarbons in Cyprus's exclusive territorial zone by Turkish warships, and that in its conclusions of 8 December 2008, the Council urges the avoidance of any kind of threat, source of friction or action which could damage good neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

It would be a good thing, Commissioner, for you to push Turkey in the right direction, precisely as set out in your statements. We have tabled an amendment on this point, the content of which is fully in keeping with your statements, Commissioner, which are therefore the statements of the European Commission.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, in Paragraph 17, rapporteur Mrs Oomen-Ruijten calls upon the whole of Turkish society to practise freedom of religion on a large scale. I fully endorse this appeal, because it touches on one of Turkey's and the EU's basic accession criteria.

In the meantime, however, Turkish education and the Turkish media are competing in the dissemination of the stereotypical caricature of indigenous Christians, Turkish Christians, as enemies of their nation, as accomplices of western powers, who wish to re-colonise the homeland and share it out between them. Commissioner, will you call the passive Turkish Government, who are also responsible for this, to account for this accession obstacle?

Also, Commissioner, all Turkish identity documents reveal the religion of its citizens, the very cause of many forms of social discrimination against Turkish Christians. This is ample reason, Commissioner, to insist on the immediate scrapping of this section in official documents with your Turkish interlocutor.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, although Croatia appears to have made satisfactory progress on adopting legislation to combat discrimination, I would suggest that before we praise the statements made in the resolution, we should check to see how the laws are applied. For example, with regard to access to real estate, especially as far as opportunities for Italian investment are concerned, there appears to me to have been very little progress made in practice. I do not support the resolution because, despite the obvious deficiency of the progress made and the discrepancies with the *acquis communautaire*, it looks forward to accession that may take place, in my opinion, too soon. Let them give back what they have stolen from our Istrian and Dalmatian refugees since 1947. Then, and only then, can we talk about their accession.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE). – (SV) Mr President, the resolution on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is, in my opinion, a well-balanced text and I would like to thank Mr Meijer for concentrating his work both on the reforms and objectives that have been achieved and on the issues that still require further efforts. I am particularly pleased about the fact that the resolution sends the clear message that the current situation after three years of waiting to start negotiations is very worrying and unacceptable. It is absolutely clear that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a European state whose place is within the European Union.

When we discuss this issue in Parliament, I usually avoid mentioning the name dispute between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I believe that there are many other issues that should be discussed more thoroughly that we never discuss because the name dispute takes a disproportionate amount of time. Today, however, having read a number of the amendments, I feel the need to emphasise very strongly that it is unacceptable to exploit whatever bilateral conflicts there may be to make it more difficult for a country to move faster towards European integration or to prevent a country's participation in international institutions.

Many countries have had, and still have, bilateral conflicts, and we all want these conflicts resolved as quickly as possible in a way that is acceptable to both sides, but in the meantime, they should not, in my opinion, block the European integration process for each other, particularly when the countries in question are in a sensitive position, both geographically and politically.

Józef Pinior (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, for the third year in a row, I am acting as rapporteur for the Socialist Group in the European Parliament regarding the progress report for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I must say that the situation regarding Macedonia is reminiscent of a scene from an ancient Greek tragedy. Whilst it is true that the good will of all parties is universally declared, nothing further than this is forthcoming. Three years ago, I was sure that at the end of the present Parliamentary term, we would be able to talk about success in negotiations with Macedonia concerning accession to the European Union. This has not happened. The main problem is the matter of the name. Irrespective of the fact that this is a bilateral question unrelated to the Copenhagen criteria, it is affecting the political situation during negotiations with Macedonia concerning accession. Greece is willing, Macedonia itself is willing, but, for several years now, it has not been possible to come to an understanding in this matter. As rapporteur for this report for the Socialist Group, I can only express the hope that this question will be resolved with the interest of the European Union, Macedonia and Greece in view.

There is a problem with the stabilisation of political institutions in Macedonia. We see this very clearly. We also see very clearly the political will of society, the authorities and political groups in a country which is moving towards ties with the European Union. The Council should decide to commence accession negotiations before the end of 2009, but this should be dependent on full realisation of the most important priorities of prior understandings. In this respect, the forthcoming Presidential and local elections in Macedonia are very important. We in the European Parliament are going to monitor these elections closely.

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE). – Mr President, thank you for clarifying that. Greece joined the European Union in 1981 and membership has brought many benefits to that country, of which I am extremely fond. Almost 30 years later, however, Macedonia naturally wants to join the European Union and share those same benefits. It is therefore only right that Greece, as a neighbouring Balkan state, expresses its firm solidarity and works to help a small country like Macedonia to achieve its aspirations.

But because of its own province named Macedonia, Greece objects to the use of the name 'Republic of Macedonia' on its own, insisting instead on 'former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia', or FYROM. For the sake of consistency, why does Greece not therefore also insist on calling Estonia the 'Former Soviet Republic of Estonia' as a formal title?

I therefore regret that Greece is now considering applying its veto to Macedonia's membership over this issue. I fear that Greece risks bringing itself into ridicule and I urge the Government in Athens to soften its line. I am known in this House and in my constituency as a strong philhellene and a friend of Greek and Cypriot MEPs alike, but I am also a member of the newly formed EP Friends of Macedonia. Let us resolve this outstanding issue promptly and sensibly. Also, I call on Parliament to send a delegation of MEPs to observe Macedonia's forthcoming presidential election and help legitimise the outcome.

As regards Croatia's imminent EU accession, it is regrettable that border disputes with Slovenia remain outstanding. As in the case of Greece and Macedonia, these difficulties must be solved bilaterally rather than being dragged into the EU accession process.

Slovenia joined the European Union while it still had outstanding issues with Italy, which did not stand in its way and try and block its accession, so I see no reason why Croatia should be held back in turn. In a similar vein and in future, I would never countenance Croatia vetoing Serbia's admission because of territorial disputes.

Of more immediate concern to my electors who are suffering from enlargement fatigue is the scale of organised crime and corruption in Croatia, which the Government must truly make it a national priority to eradicate.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE

Vice-President

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE). – (DE) Madam President, first may I clarify that I am speaking on the subject of Turkey on behalf of my group and not in my own name. Developments in Turkey are a matter for concern to liberals and democrats. In three years, there has not only been too little progress in the pace of reform, there have also been some setbacks. As Commissioner Rehn rightly stated here, freedom of the press is a core value in the European Union. In a country which wants to accede to the EU, there must be respect for the freedom of the press beyond all doubt.

However, what we see is something else. Critical journalists have difficulty obtaining credentials. The new owner of ATV still has a great many questions to answer, there are calls from the highest offices for a boycott on certain media and the Dohan group has been hit with an arbitrary tax penalty of EUR 400 million. This is an arbitrary measure which brings us to the question of the rule of law, which is as important to liberals as freedom of the press. The rule of law must also be guaranteed. Reports on increasing cases of torture and maltreatment in police custody are deeply worrying to us, especially where they take place outside official prisons or police stations, but of course, if they take place there, that of course also worries us.

Symbolic or purely pragmatic measures such as the acceptance of a new programme or the appointment of a new chief negotiator are welcome, if you look at it from a purely practical point of view. However, they alone are not enough to give renewed impetus to the pace of reform. In the opinion of the liberals and democrats, Turkey must reform its economy and society, politics and constitution irrespective of its accession prospects, in its own interest, in the interests of its people.

I should like if I may to say something else about this debate. This debate reminds me of a fairground carousel, on which sometimes a Turkish, sometimes a Croatian and sometimes a Macedonian horse rides by. I think we should restructure this debate, and soon. Moreover, I would be grateful if we held it in Brussels and not in Strasbourg.

Mario Borghesio (UEN). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, on the question of Croatia, well, those who speak on behalf of and were elected by the Italian public have a duty to point out their rightful claim. Over 60 years have gone by since the historic theft of our property in Istria and Dalmatia. Croatia has a moral duty to perform and President Barroso has a dossier on this delicate and injurious issue, which must be brought to people's attention. It is primarily a moral issue rather than a political one, a matter of returning property to its rightful owners: 1 411 estates originally belonged to Italians.

As for Turkey, how can we think of calmly granting membership to a country that is at present imposing an Islamic veto, within NATO, on the nomination of a Secretary General merely because he represents a country, namely Denmark, in which the cartoon affair took place. Turkey, an Islamic country, has called an Islamic halt to the nomination of a Prime Minister to the post of Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance, for the sole reason that he is Prime Minister of a country in which Islamic cartoons were published – a liberal country in which obviously, by contrast with Turkey, it is possible to publish ironic cartoons about Mohammed. In Turkey there is a law – and the Commissioner should be aware of this – that prohibits the construction of any non-Islamic place of worship on a street on which there is a mosque. In other words, if there is a mosque on that street, then no other religious building is allowed. Our rapporteur, who is I think wearing a lovely pair of trousers, would not today be allowed to walk into the Turkish parliament in her trouser suit. That shows how far behind we are. Turkey is Asia, not Europe.

Angelika Beer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, first may I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister of Macedonia here today on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

Secondly, my thanks to the Czech President-in-Office of the Council and for the statement by Prime Minister Topolánek, who firstly pointed out yesterday that the dispute between Macedonia and Greece over names is a bilateral affair and should have no repercussions, and who secondly argued in favour of Macedonia's accession to NATO as quickly as possible, and hence for Greece to withdraw its veto – two very important points.

We are perhaps sometimes somewhat arrogant when we debate candidate countries, which is why I should like to raise the issue of personal responsibility, because we discuss the prospects and shortcomings of candidate countries here but, on the other hand, we have very fundamental political forces, such as the conservatives in Germany, who want to push for Croatia to be accepted and for no other states to follow.

If this were to become the majority opinion in the European Union in the next parliamentary term, it would destroy the heavily-financed peace plan set up after the Balkan wars. We would lose credibility and the credibility of Europe would be set back. I ask everyone to resist that.

With Croatia and Slovenia we assume that, without double standards and without any veto, things are going well and that the border disputes can be set aside and we hope that negotiations will be started with Macedonia as quickly as possible.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). – Madam President, if Turkey joins the European Union, it will be the poorest and most economically backward Member State, with a population of over 72 million people. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people will migrate to countries like Britain.

The European Union will border countries such as Syria, Iraq and Iran, with enormous potential for future conflict and confrontation.

However, the people who should really be worried about Turkish entry are Greek Cypriots: if Turkey joins the EU, the Turks will have the right to go anywhere in the EU. Thousands of Turks will be able to legally go to Southern Cyprus and effectively occupy it, quite legitimately, if they so wish.

In the European elections on 4 June, voters of Greek origin in London should remember that the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green Parties all enthusiastically support Turkish entry. The only British party in the European Parliament that opposes Turkish entry is the UK Independence Party.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Madam President, if nothing else, the negotiations with Turkey have helped the Commission and Council perfect the art of euphemisms. The way in which the problems in Turkey are being

minimised is starting to become impressive. This has even become the subject of occasional ridicule in Turkey.

The catalogue of problems is so extensive that it is puzzling that the negotiations are still carrying on. Indeed, the Commission had promised that the negotiation process would keep pace with the reform process in Turkey. This promise has well and truly been broken now, because new chapters are being opened constantly.

The balance sheet of more than three years of negotiations is positively lamentable. Let us therefore pull the plug. Turkey is not a European country and does not, therefore, belong to the European Union, but let us instead work out a relationship of privileged partnership.

Doris Pack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, Croatia is the first country for whose accession to the European Union, following experience from the last two enlargements with Romania and Bulgaria, the bar has rightly been set very high, which is why the benchmarks and progress made by Croatia are especially praiseworthy. The remaining reforms in the judiciary referred to are being tackled. Full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, the call for which was reiterated, is on the right path.

With Slovenia, there is the question of bilateral border disputes. Commissioner, you suddenly referred to 'European border disputes'. Before 2004, they were not European border disputes; they were border disputes which were not acknowledged. Nor, at that time, did anyone apply to the UN in order to settle this dispute; now they have done so. So, if Slovenia stopped obstructing the opening of the necessary negotiation chapter on the grounds of these bilateral border disputes, which were not an obstacle to its accession to the European Union, accession negotiations between Croatia and the EU could be concluded by the end of this year.

The candidate country Macedonia has also made huge progress. If the elections to be held at the end of March meet international standards, the EU would finally have to set a date for the opening of accession negotiations. The purely bilateral dispute over names between Macedonia and Greece should not encourage Greece to enter a veto.

All that remains is to hope that the two EU Member States of Greece and Slovenia remember their own situation before their accession to the EU and conclude that they should act fairly and in a European manner towards their neighbouring states.

If, with the help of their neighbours, Croatia and Macedonia achieve the objectives I have described this year, that would send out a positive signal to the rest of the Western Balkan states that the EU is serious about the promise given in Thessaloniki about the accession of all the Western Balkan states, by which the CDU also stands Mrs Beer.

Libor Rouček (PSE). – (CS) I would like to make a few comments. Firstly, it is good that this debate on EU expansion is taking place because it is important that even in a period of great economic crisis, Europe does not lose sight of one of its successful priorities, namely further expansion. We must maintain our focus on this priority. Secondly, as far as Croatia is concerned, I firmly believe that the accession talks can be completed this year. I would therefore like to call on the Council to act now and set up the technical working group that will be tasked with drafting the accession treaty. As far as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is concerned, it is unfortunate and demoralising for Macedonia that accession talks have not yet started in Skopje, despite the fact that it is three years since Macedonia obtained candidate country status. I would therefore like to call on the Council to speed up this process. And as far as Turkey is concerned, I agree that political reforms must be accelerated before the so-called political chapters can be opened. However, I cannot understand why it is not possible to negotiate with Turkey over the 'Energy' chapter, for example, which is vitally important, both for the EU and Turkey.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – (SL) We in the ALDE Group support Mr Meier's report. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) deserves an opportunity and a better future. What it also needs, however, is a modicum of international respect, including the right to its own identity and recognition of its own language and culture.

The issue of the country's name has been dragging on for too long and the atmosphere in the country has been worsening for some time. There has been more and more populism and nationalism, there is too much political entrenchment, and verbal attacks are being levelled at neighbouring countries. Naming infrastructural installations after characters from the periods of Greek history which predated the arrival of the Slavs in

those regions is not conducive to good neighbourly relations. Erecting more 10 m tall monuments is unnecessary.

If we wish to prevent instability, we need to help the state, politicians and people of FYROM to break out of the blockade. Abolishing visas does not go far enough. What this country needs is a date for the beginning of negotiations. They deserve the opportunity to show their merit during the accession process. We need to help them now and show that we have confidence in them. This will help us contribute stability to the region and facilitate development in a positive direction. FYROM needs a positive response now, because time is very much of the essence. In fact, you could say that time is money.

Allow me also to say a few words about Croatia. Commissioner, two former prime ministers of Slovenia and Croatia, respectively, namely Drnovšek and Račan, attained a major achievement when they concluded an agreement concerning the border. Unfortunately, they are no longer with us, but they had the courage to press ahead, invest in the future and attain an achievement of some kind. I think it is right for you to urge both governments to follow in their footsteps and to reach an agreement concerning the border again, and in the near future, too. That would be a good thing for Slovenia, Croatia, the European Union and the Western Balkans.

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, negotiations with Turkey about accession to the EU are still in progress, although they should have been completed long ago. The Turkish Government has not presented a cohesive and comprehensive programme of political reforms. Turkey has not recommenced work on a new secular constitution, an important element of which was supposed to be protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms which the Turkish government was going to guarantee.

Discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities continues. Turkey has not taken steps either to strengthen the impartiality of judicial institutions. Freedom of speech and of the press is still not protected in Turkey, indeed, it is openly violated. Domestic violence and forced marriages continue to be common.

Turkey's opposition to strategic cooperation between the EU and NATO manifestly acts against the interests of the Community. Furthermore, Turkey does not recognise the independence of one of the Member States of the European Union, namely Cyprus. This is a scandal. Turkey is a country which is antidemocratic, it violates human rights, and is guided by a value system which is foreign to us. It will be much better for Europe if Turkey does not become a member of the EU.

Sepp Kusstatscher (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Thank you, Madam President. In this very comprehensive debate here today, I just want to highlight one problem and that is the issue of multilingualism in Macedonia.

Conflict broke out recently in schools in Struga between Albanian- and Macedonian-speaking parents. Under pressure from these nationalistic-minded parents, those in charge reacted by separating teaching by ethnic groups, which is a step in the wrong direction. The learning of languages is not fostered by keeping linguistic groups apart; it is fostered by informally bringing people who speak different languages together at school, at work and at play. The teaching of English, which is now already compulsory across the board from year one, is of course to be welcomed, but it should not be used as an excuse by Macedonians not to learn Albanian or for Albanians not to learn Macedonian. Schools in multilingual regions have a very particular task: they must teach the children their mother tongue and the language of their neighbours.

United in diversity is the motto of the EU and should also apply to Macedonians.

Hanne Dahl (IND/DEM). – (DA) Madam President, I believe that Turkey should be a member of the EU. The criticism of Turkey is justified in many cases, but the excuses and the sitting on the fence must stop and a serious plan for Turkey joining the EU should be drawn up. It will take time, but the country must join and this is something we should say in a clear and binding way. Instead of a pseudo-debate on democracy in Turkey, we need a real and open discussion on the place that religion can and should play in the social debate. We need to create a form of European cooperation that is capable of meeting the challenge presented by a Europe made up of different religions. That is, we need to do this without losing sight of the central values and the inviolability of the person springing from the European values created in the melting pot of Jewish, Christian and Hellenistic culture in the centuries before and after the birth of Christ.

Carl Lang (NI). – (FR) Madam President, I have one minute to say to you that, despite the determination and the blindness of the European institutions, one thing should be obvious to everyone: the time has come to put an end to Turkey's accession process.

Negotiations have become bogged down, there is a mutual lack of understanding and a permanent state of ambiguity. This situation is detrimental to all – to the European Union as well as to Turkey. We have to stop the hypocrisy and the pretence.

We must remember one obvious fact. Turkey is a country in Asia Minor. Turkey is not a European country, either geographically or culturally. Turkey is militarily occupying a part of a Member State of the European Union since, to this day, we have only ten negotiating chapters out of 35 and only one has been closed. It is time for everyone to regain their freedom, independence and sovereignty, starting with Cyprus.

The people of Europe do not want Turkey in Europe. Let us respect our people and show respect for Europe!

Pál Schmitt (PPE-DE). – (HU) As chairman of the EU-Croatia Joint Parliamentary Committee, I would like to draw your attention to a highly significant development. On Monday, the Croatian Prime Minister – and not only the Prime Minister but the President as well, and each of the parliament's opposition parties – agreed that the EU should mediate in resolving the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia based on international law. I consider it unprecedented in the history of the EU that one Member State should paralyse the enlargement of the Union and currently prevent 12 negotiation chapters from being opened, while back in 2001, at the time of its own accession talks, it declared that it had no border disputes with its neighbours.

Since the start of accession negotiations in 2005, numerous results have been achieved regarding the transformation of the judicial system and public administration, anti-corruption measures, minority rights, refugee return and regional cooperation. In the case of Croatia, this involved for the first time the attainment of a set of benchmarks. Around 100 of these were successfully achieved. Through these extraordinary efforts, the Croatian people now look forward at last to positive messages from the European Union. The sensitive and self-conscious population was disappointed when a neighbouring, friendly country single-handedly blocked the continuation of the accession negotiations. The long-term, reassuring stabilisation of the Balkans is possible only by way of European integration. The Union is mistaken if it allows Slovenia to obstruct Croatian talks because of its bilateral dispute, even though Croatia has done everything possible in the interests of defending fundamental European values and adopting the *acquis*. I would note, Madam President, that it is unfortunate – perhaps for those who are listening to us as well – that we are dealing with the fate of three important, historic countries at the same time, as if they were one and the same. It might have been better to discuss the three countries each in its turn.

Emine Bozkurt (PSE). – (NL) Madam President, I should like to take up a point which Mrs Oomen-Ruijten also made, namely that of political criteria. In the negotiation process with Turkey, civil rights were very clearly placed on the agenda. This is also reflected in this report.

A number of things have clearly improved: Kurdish television, but also the installation of a women's committee in the Turkish Parliament, for which I, as rapporteur on women's rights in Turkey, worked extremely hard in recent years. These are major reforms.

Another obvious improvement is the increase in the number of shelters for abused women. What happens, though, to those women when they leave the shelters? How are they and their children looked after? Turkey should address this issue. With the local council elections to be held at the end of this month, more women should sit on the local councils.

I should also like to draw your attention to the fight against fraud. Turkey should cooperate with the European Union more effectively in the fight against fraud and in the fight against female trafficking, because far too many people become the victim of fraud involving the green funds or fraud involving charity organisations.

Jim Allister (NI). – Madam President, I have never supported the admission of non-European Turkey into the EU, but the current economic downturn makes me more convinced than ever of that view.

As a huge net contributor, the United Kingdom carries a disproportionate burden in funding the EU so, when it comes to the massive additional cost of enlargement to include Turkey, we would be burdened beyond what we could bear. With a reduced tax base, falling income and increased welfare outlay, and a crippling debt legacy in the future decades arising from the mismanagement of the Labour Government, we cannot go on taking out our diminishing cheque book to pay for Turkish enlargement.

Call that narrow, mercenary national interest if you will, but to me it is inescapable common and fiscal sense.

Antonios Trakatellis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Madam President, as the oldest member in the region of both the European Union and NATO, Greece was and continues to be at the vanguard of efforts to integrate all the

Balkan countries into the Euro-Atlantic structures, because it firmly believes that the development of countries in the area will benefit everyone.

Greece has invested over a billion dollars in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and has created 20 000 jobs, which is unprecedented for foreign investment in a local economy. As far as Greece is concerned, the question of the name is not simply a problem with historic, psychological or sentimental dimensions. It is an ongoing material political issue which concerns all Greek citizens and the European values of good neighbourly and regional cooperation.

I would remind the House that Greece consented to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia being granted candidate status for accession to the European Union in document COM(2007)0663, with an express commitment to negotiating a mutually acceptable solution on the question of the name under the aegis of the UN which would contribute to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, because without a solution, there can be no friendship and without friendship, there can be no alliances or partnerships.

Our representation is not opposed to all the expressions in the report which strongly support a solution to the issue under the aegis of the UN. Unfortunately, however, over and beyond this clear position, there are additional phrases in paragraphs 12 and 13 which undermine efforts to resolve the problem and encourage intransigence, which is why they are absolutely unacceptable, while Amendments 1 and 2 restore the correct wording to paragraphs 12 and 13.

For the rest, the report contains many elements which will help the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue its efforts on the road towards Europe.

Maria Eleni Koppa (PSE). – (EL) Madam President, the policy of enlargement is the most successful expression of the European Union's foreign policy. In the case of Turkey, the message must be clear: the objective is integration, but it comes through fulfilling its obligations, consolidating democracy, respecting human rights and maintaining good neighbourly relations.

Turkey is at a crucial stage, both internally and in redefining its geostrategic role. Within this framework, it is vital that it continues its reforms and moves steadily towards Europe. However, I would point out that the climate of tension which Turkey recently cultivated in the Aegean has caused new problems.

In the case of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Commission clearly emphasised that the country does not meet the basic requirements for the opening of negotiations, given that it has significant democratic deficits. As far as the dispute over the name is concerned, despite the fact that Greece has demonstrated a spirit of cooperation and realism, the government in Skopje has failed to respond.

Unfortunately, however, in the report by the European Parliament which we are examining today, my country is presented as the only country responsible for the delay in opening negotiations. That is unfair on Greece and does not facilitate the resolution of a problem which has plagued both countries for over 15 years.

Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE). – (SL) So far, I have endorsed all of the European Parliament's reports charting Croatia's progress on its way to fully-fledged membership of the European Union. I salute Croatia's many new achievements on this occasion, too. I will be happy to endorse this important report, which has been painstakingly prepared by my fellow member Mr Swoboda, as well, provided that the compromise amendments reflect a balanced and realistic approach. That is the only kind of approach that can eliminate the causes of the obstacles and speed up the process of Croatia's accession.

I fully agree with the President-in-Office, Mr Vondra, when he says that we need a constructive and dynamic approach. In this context, it seems important to me that, following a string of unsuccessful bilateral attempts, the European Commission has now, with its mediation initiative, offered an opportunity for a new and credible attempt to be made to reach a final resolution of the problem of the border between Slovenia and Croatia and, by the same token, to make rapid progress in accession negotiations with Croatia.

I am pleased to note that both countries have been receptive to the initiative and that talks have commenced at a high level. I hope that the initiative will bring us much closer to a threefold victory: a victory for Croatia, Slovenia and the European Union. We cannot allow only one party to be the winner or only one viewpoint to prevail: we can only win if we work on the basis of common objectives and common will.

Likewise, I agree with the rapporteur, Mr Swoboda, when he says that we need to observe the principle of equity, which is part of international law. I also fully agree with the Commissioner, Mr Rehn, that a suitable

point of departure for the settlement of the border dispute is the United Nations Charter and that the Commission's initiative reflects the spirit of the Charter.

It is time for the negotiating table to take centre stage, without any rhetoric or pressures which might injure either party's dignity or Croatia's accession status. We need a positive atmosphere. I firmly believe that we have only one positive solution in prospect, one that Slovenia and Croatia will agree on under the mediation of a third party, i.e. the European Commission. I would like to see this happen as soon as possible.

Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Madam President, I agree and recognise Turkey's European prospects, but if these prospects are to have an auspicious outcome, Turkey needs to:

Firstly, really respect the rights of minorities and avoid policies such as those which it applies, for example, in Imvros and Tenedos.

Secondly, improve its relations with Greece, a Member State that supports its European prospects, for example, by removing the *casus belli* and putting a stop to its infringements in the Aegean once and for all.

Thirdly, make progress on the Cyprus question. This progress will be marked, on the one hand, by the removal of Turkish occupying troops and, on the other hand, by taking a constructive stand on all aspects in order to resolve the question. I would remind the House that I belong to the generation which grew up with the slogan 'our borders are in Kyrenia'.

Joel Hasse Ferreira (PSE). – (PT) The process leading to Turkey's accession to the European Union is advancing at a slow pace. At this moment in time, it is not the moderate pace with which reforms are being carried out in Turkey that is holding up the process, but the slowness of the Council and the European Commission. The economic, social and political impact of this future accession was discussed in depth last December in the Polish city of Sopot, at a conference at which I had the pleasure and honour of speaking.

As regards the priorities of the Turkish Government, it is appropriate to mention the breakfast meeting that was held with Prime Minister Erdogan last January in Brussels. That meeting resulted in a timely clarification, which was complemented by contacts made by some of us with the Republican side and by a varied group of people and organisations from the Turkish Republic, in addition to the constant work that we have done in the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee.

To end, I would say, Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, that this process is decisive for a truly enlarged Europe, which is strong and open to the world, secular and democratic, and in which the democratically unified Republic of Cyprus has the place that it deserves.

Metin Kazak (ALDE). – (BG) Thank you, Madam President. Turkey plays a key role in Europe's geo-strategic and energy security and will continue to be a stabilising factor during the crisis too. It is true that events such as the proceedings to close down the AK Party, the 'Ergenekon' case and the local elections slowed down the reforms in the country, but the appointment of a new chief negotiator will create a fine opportunity for the Turkish Government to accelerate the process of harmonising its legislation with European standards and to make progress in the political criteria in the negotiation chapters.

I believe that Turkey should achieve three priorities if it wants to make serious progress on its way to membership. Firstly, it must continue to work constructively for a successful outcome to the discussions on the question of Cyprus, but this commitment must be shared by all countries in the process and must not be used as a pretext for blocking the negotiations. Secondly, it must respect freedom of speech and thought. Thirdly, it must guarantee protection for minority communities, especially with regards to their cultural and educational rights. As Turkey continues all the time to modernise, it must win back its pro-European supporters. Thank you.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE). – (NL) Madam President, I was one of the MEPs who voted in favour of Turkey prior to the opening of the negotiations, and to my mind, these negotiations are, in reality, an exercise in conflict prevention. I am convinced that the negotiations will impact greatly on many areas of policy. They are set to create a better social climate in Turkey, better environmental and health legislation and better labour law for Turkish people.

In time, the negotiations will also bring about better living conditions for many population groups: women, religious minority groups, Kurds and Alevites. Progress is too slow, though. There has been a standstill for four years now, and there are many painful areas that deserve to be addressed. The discrimination against

parties such as the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) is unacceptable. There is a lack of civil and political supervision of the army, and this is simply unacceptable.

The freedom of opinion and the freedom of the press are essential, and torture and abuse in prisons cannot be tolerated. The Kurdish problem also requires a political solution as a matter of absolute necessity. I take the view that under these circumstances, we should definitely continue the negotiations.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (GUE/NGL). – Madam President, I would like to congratulate Commissioner Rehn on his position on the Oomen-Ruijten report, which was that it is essential for Turkey to proactively support the ongoing talks between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus. That is why we are in full agreement with the rapporteur when, in paragraph 40 of her report, she calls on Turkey ‘to facilitate a suitable climate for negotiations by withdrawing Turkish forces and allowing the two leaders to negotiate freely their country’s future’.

I would suggest that, at this moment of direct talks, it might not be advisable for the European Parliament to include in its report any proposal for derogations from the *acquis*.

To complement the rapporteur’s position, we also call on Turkey to comply with its obligations regarding investigations into the fate of missing persons and to stop interfering in the Republic of Cyprus’ exclusive economic zone. In so doing, Turkey will itself facilitate its way towards accession.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, yesterday I submitted an oral question to the Commission and received a note from Parliament’s Secretariat informing me that the Commissioner was going to answer my question this afternoon.

I declare that my name is Panayotopoulos and that I submitted a question about paragraph 6 of the framework for negotiations with Turkey.

President. – Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, I think that the Commissioner has heard you.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – Madam President, we have had a very long but important debate here today. This is a crucial year in the accession process for Croatia and for the whole of the Western Balkan region and we certainly attach importance to and welcome Parliament’s continued support in bringing Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Western Balkans closer to the EU.

Much has been said about the lack of progress in Turkey regarding its reform effort. We therefore welcome the reaffirmed commitment of Turkey towards its EU path, as Mr Erdogan said, and invite her to take the opportunity in 2009 to prove this commitment and make further progress in its path towards the EU.

Turkey has to deliver on long-awaited reforms. The continuing support of the European Parliament throughout the process is significant, in particular, given the challenges ahead. I will have the opportunity of meeting the Turkish negotiator tomorrow in Prague.

At the same time, we should not take lightly the strategic importance of Turkey, in particular, in the current turbulent times, nor should we forget our previous commitments. As far as I know, President Obama, during his visit to Europe, may visit Turkey as a kind of model Muslim country. I think that this is not the time for Europeans to give up in our engagement with Turkey. I think that Joost Lagendijk, rightly, said this.

Concerning the border dispute between Croatia and Slovenia, I was listening carefully to what Hannes Swoboda, István Szent-Iványi and many others said, so let me just repeat that we as the Presidency welcome the fact that both Slovenia and Croatia have now agreed to pursue their work on Commissioner Rehn’s initiative concerning this dispute. We fully support this initiative and we are concerned that it has not generated any fruitful outcome yet regarding the specific terms of facilitation. We note that time is running out, and the Presidency is keen to ensure concrete progress in the negotiations based on the work already done. We are therefore considering the possibilities for enhancing our support for the Commissioner’s initiative in the near future. We were just discussing this over lunch.

Concerning the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bernd Posselt, among others, said that we should support the effort of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and I think he is right. I shall just mention that the Czech Prime Minister Topolánek visited Skopje yesterday and reaffirmed our commitment to the European aspiration of this country.

Olli Rehn, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I want to thank Members for a very constructive, substantive and responsible debate, and I would like to make just a few points concerning your speeches.

First, it is clear that all policy making in Europe and in the world is overshadowed by the very challenging context of today, because of the financial crisis and the economic recession that our citizens are feeling and, of course, this is dominating the minds of our leaders in the European Union.

Still, it is absolutely essential that we as the European Union maintain our commitment to the EU perspective on south-eastern Europe, and this has been the expressed political will here today in the European Parliament, which I welcome and appreciate.

Secondly, concerning Cyprus, my friend, Mr Wiersma, said that I must be an optimist. I think something was lost in translation, even though I thought I was speaking English – maybe with a somewhat ethnic accent from eastern Finland! However, I do not consider myself either an optimist or a pessimist, but rather I am usually a realist as regards the analysis of things and determined as regards those issues that I can really influence. Here, I think that it is absolutely essential that we support the talks of the two leaders and of the two communities that are going on at the moment, so that we can seize the opportunity in 2009 to achieve a comprehensive settlement and, of course, we expect Turkey will contribute to a favourable political climate to achieve such a settlement.

From the point of view of the European Union, it is important to ensure that any solution is in line with the Union's founding principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. In other words, the EU can support any such solution that creates a united Cyprus respecting the principles on which the EU was founded and able to carry the obligations of EU membership. This clearly implies a bi-zonal, bi-communal federation with political equality, as defined by the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council.

Finally, concerning Croatia, I thank the speakers for their support for the Commission's initiative on mediation – an initiative that is based on international law, and here I refer to both the UN Charter and the negotiating framework between the EU and Croatia. I can only underline that, whatever method is chosen, it will need to be a bilateral agreement between the two countries, Slovenia and Croatia. We are working on that in order to facilitate such an agreement.

I sincerely wish that you can support the Commission's initiative in your resolution so as not to create a situation where we would have to return to square one, because this is the only realistic and viable way forward.

Let me conclude by saying that I sincerely believe that it is still possible for Croatia to reach the ambitious target of concluding the accession negotiations by the end of 2009, provided that the negotiations can proceed soon. That is why I encourage both countries to agree rapidly so as to solve the border issue and, without delay, unblock Croatia's EU accession negotiations. I should like to thank you for your support for this initiative.

President. – I have received three motions for resolutions⁽²⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, 12 March 2009.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, I have a specific question for the Commissioner, namely whether he agrees or proposes that the phrase 'principle of equity' in the Commission statement be replaced by the phrase 'international law and jurisprudence'.

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Mr Posselt, the debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I congratulate Mrs Oomen-Ruijten for this excellently drafted report.

I would like to highlight two ideas:

⁽²⁾ See Minutes.

1) First of all, I believe that the EU must continue to encourage the development in Turkey of pro-European, modern, secular elites, as well as spread European values and good quality information about European integration. To this end, the EU must support more actively educational reform in Turkey, the guarantee of universities' autonomy, the development of European integration studies and the Erasmus Programme. Students, researchers and teachers who want to study EU institutions and policies in depth must be encouraged and supported in this.

2) Secondly, at the same time as supporting the rights of those belonging to national minorities, the EU must resolutely condemn actions by ethnic separatists. I am referring to Kurdish separatism in Turkey and Turkish separatism in Cyprus, but there are also other examples. The EU must support the strict application of the principles of territorial integrity and good neighbourliness with regard to Turkey, Iraq, Cyprus and the other countries in the region.

Richard Corbett (PSE), in writing. – I am encouraged that the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Commission are confident that negotiations for Croatia's accession to the EU can be concluded this year. Croatia has made good progress in adopting the Community acquis, the anti-corruption body USKOK has intensified its work and legislation has been introduced to reform the Croatian judiciary.

However, this is tempered by the knowledge that cases remain where the ICTY has been unable to access certain documents relating to alleged war crimes, and further attention must be given to minority rights such as the status of the Krajina Serbs and refugee return.

Enlargement is one of the great successes of the modern European Union. Having integrated many European nations ravaged by the Cold War, we must now do the same for the Western Balkans. Croatian accession is the first crucial step.

Alexandra Dobolyi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) The Turkish question has always been surrounded by misgivings and mistrust. There were always problems that went far beyond the need for fulfilling the strict criteria for accession.

In that respect, it is enough to look at what kind of neighbourly relations Turkey maintains with other EU Member States such as Greece, Cyprus or with a country outside the EU like Armenia. Furthermore, if we take into account that Turkey is the only state that considers the European Union to consist of only 26 Member States, it is strange that Turkey itself would wish to join and belong to this community in the future.

My position is that as long as the country does not substantially change its behaviour on fundamental issues, the process of its accession to the EU will vanish into the future. When the EU decided to start accession negotiations, it was done in the hope and expectation that Turkey does indeed have a place in the European family. Let me ask this question: is it certain that Turkey today thinks along these lines?

If and when Turkey engages unambiguously in establishing good relations with its neighbours, settling outstanding problems peacefully in conformity with the UN Charter and other European documents, then there is hope.

If Turkey fulfils these criteria without reservation, then chances are that it will gain the support of each of us, and may also regain the sympathy of European citizens.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE), in writing. – (PL) Over the last year, we have seen significant progress and the intensive efforts of Croatia in accession negotiations. Negotiations over EU membership are on the right road, although the country must concentrate on further reforms in such areas as administration, the justice system, the economy, the battle against corruption and organised crime, respect for and protection of minorities, and the investigation of war crimes.

Continued efforts are essential for full transposition of the *acquis* and its effective implementation. Furthermore, it is extremely important to bring about an improvement in the relations of Croatia with its neighbours and, in particular, with Slovenia, and to find a definitive solution to the question of the borders with other neighbouring countries.

Croatia should also include in its policy for development the objectives which the European Union currently sets for itself in the area of the climate package and renewable sources of energy.

The further progress of Croatia in accession negotiations depends, in particular, on the completion of essential political, economic, legislative and administrative reforms. In this context it should be recalled that the

Commission's road map is a very useful and helpful tool which supports Croatia in finalising individual chapters of the negotiations. I hope that it will be possible to reach the closing phase of the negotiations, perhaps even this year.

András Gyürk (PPE-DE), in writing. – (HU) Energy cooperation has emerged as one of the major questions in EU-Turkey relations. The main reason for this is that Turkey, as a transit country, can significantly contribute to reducing the EU's dependency on energy sources and to diversifying its energy supply. Enhanced cooperation with Turkey can, at the same time, be an important step towards expanding the internal energy market.

I am convinced that the fundamental goals of Turkey and the European Union point in the same direction. We would like to meet the growing demand for energy consumption from as many sources as possible. Promoting diversification is most urgent in the area of gas supply. To this end, the construction of the Nabucco pipeline is of key importance. The gas crisis in January has demonstrated more powerfully than ever the need for the aforementioned infrastructure. Therefore, it is a welcome development that the European economic stimulus plan should set aside resources for the construction of the gas pipeline.

With regard to Nabucco, before the first shovel of soil can be turned, we need bilateral governmental agreements involving Turkey as soon as possible. I consider regrettable the comments that link Ankara's attitude to Nabucco directly with the country's accession to the EU. I am convinced that cooperation on energy policy matters cannot be turned into a foreign policy weapon. For this reason, more intensive energy dialogue is needed between the European Union and Turkey. One possible stage in this could be the opening of the chapter on energy.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The Commission's annual report on the progress made by Turkey in 2008 as a candidate state is balanced. Although the reform process should be given a boost and eight negotiating chapters are still blocked, the Commission has welcomed in particular Turkey's recent diplomatic activity and its role in promoting stability in the region. The events of summer 2008 highlighted Turkey's strategic role, including in the energy sector.

In the area of regional cooperation, the constructive role which Turkey played in its relations with neighbouring countries and in the Middle East through active diplomacy was noted. The developments in the Caucasus highlighted Turkey's strategic importance for the EU's energy security, especially through the diversification of transport routes. The document emphasises the importance of close cooperation in the energy sector between the EU and Turkey, with the Nabucco project being a key element in this respect. Following the initiation of negotiations between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders on reaching an understanding on the Cypriot question, it is vital for Ankara to continue to support finding a solution, along with the efforts which the UN is making to this end.

The expansion of the EU and the continuing integration of Western Balkan states into the EU are priority dossiers for Romania. Romania supports the substantial progress made in the negotiations with Turkey, a process which is dynamic enough to encourage internal reforms.

Toomas Savi (ALDE), in writing. – During the past five years, the New Member states have witnessed numerous positive effects of the membership of the European Union. That experience is not to be monopolised, and I therefore support fiercely the EU's continued enlargement. However, as much as I would like to see Turkey joining the EU in the near future, the progress report unfortunately indicates something quite the opposite.

I have addressed this issue several times in this Chamber, pointing to the Armenian genocide, concerns over the Kurds and the occupation of Cyprus.

In addition to that, when examining the progress that Turkey has made towards the completion of negotiations on 35 *acquis communautaire* chapters since October 2005, one can see that only twelve chapters have been opened and, until now, just one – the chapter on science and research – has been closed.

I would like to ask the Council and the Commission how they propose to accelerate the course of the negotiations and solve the dispute on Cyprus.

Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE), in writing. – (HU) The Member States of the European Union should show greater solidarity and tolerance towards the accession countries. My country, Romania, was not prepared for accession, and there are still deficiencies in the area of minority rights. Nevertheless, Hungary did not prevent Romania from joining, because it considered European solidarity and tolerance more important. The accession

countries naturally must take greater strides towards guaranteeing human and minority rights, but current EU Member States must set a good example. I therefore consider it important for us to address the EU Member States first of all:

- to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages,
- to rescind the law, in force in one EU Member State, that introduces the notion of collective guilt,
- to learn from the example of Kosovo, to guarantee the cultural and regional autonomy of traditional national minorities living in the territory of current EU Member States.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) The stabilisation of the Western Balkans and strengthening its ties with Europe is an important task, since the region is of geostrategic importance to Europe. At the same time, from numerous perspectives, including in the areas of the economy and energy, the Western Balkans remain considerably vulnerable and dependent.

Croatia, we hope, will be able to join us in 2011, during the Hungarian Presidency, but this depends on a successful conclusion of the recently initiated bilateral talks with Slovenia, with international mediation, regarding the division of the Bay of Piran. A further condition is that Croatia cooperate fully with the International Criminal Tribunal at The Hague in searching for and handing over war criminals. Moreover, we need to send a positive message to those countries in the region where, due to various external and internal factors, the timetable for accession is still uncertain. Let us ratify as soon as possible the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia and with Bosnia and Herzegovina, grant full candidate status to all the countries in the region, and decide on a precise timetable for the earliest possible agreement on visa liberalisation. The financial crisis has dealt a severe blow to the Balkans, and if necessary, the EU Member States will have to play a part in the stabilisation of the region, and we must provide assistance to countries in difficulty. The EU must follow attentively the inter-ethnic relations in the region, paying particular attention to the sensitive internal situation in Macedonia, which currently runs the greatest risk of serious conflict in the region.

13. The mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the report (A6-0112/2009) by Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (2008/2290(INI)).

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, rapporteur. – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, since its inception in 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has indicted 161 people. Proceedings have been fully concluded against 116 of them, while for a number of other defendants, the criminal procedure is still in progress.

Proceedings are yet to start in two cases only, while two main defendants, Messrs Mladić and Hadžić, are still on the run. Although the UN Security Council has asked the Tribunal to wind up its activities by no later than the end of 2010, it has left some room for manoeuvre.

After an understandably difficult start – after all, everything was new and had to be invented on the spot, as it were – the Tribunal has turned out to be a very sound, serious and capable legal body that does not limit its activities to administering justice, which, by the way, it does with the greatest care, something which has boosted its legitimacy. In addition, the Tribunal has set up proper outreach programmes to contribute to the assimilation and reconciliation process in the countries that came into being after the former Yugoslavia collapsed.

The Tribunal also helps train national legal bodies which, after all, have to handle the lion's share of the dossiers on war crimes and crimes against humanity. Indeed, it was never the intention for the Tribunal to step into the shoes of national courts across the former Yugoslavia on a permanent basis.

Quite the reverse. It is the countries in question that have to ensure that the war crimes and crimes against humanity are prosecuted and tried. With this in mind, the Tribunal has passed on a number of dossiers to national courts and has focused on the most important cases.

The Tribunal has also set up a proper completion strategy in three stages to meet the requirements of the Security Council. The plan provides for full completion of all legal proceedings by the end of 2011, with a possible extension into 2012. To provide for all eventualities but, above all, to ensure that Messrs Mladić and Hadžić will, in any event, undergo the same procedure, an effective, highly-qualified and sufficiently equipped mechanism will need to be put in place that can take care of the rest of the tasks, even after the Tribunal's mandate has come to an end.

For all these reasons, we would ask the Council to urge the United Nations, and particularly the Security Council, to extend the Tribunal's mandate by at least two years, to see to it that after this period, a reception mechanism is provided for and to ensure that the Tribunal's archives are kept and made accessible.

In a similar, but somewhat broader, context, we would ask that a good working relationship with the Tribunal and the development of an effective judiciary which also handles crimes against humanity remain assessment criteria for our relations with the countries in the Western Balkans. We urge the countries in question to continue to lend their cooperation to the Tribunal and provide sound answers to the main prosecutor.

Finally, we ask the Commission to continue to pay attention to the training programmes and other initiatives that are aimed at mutual dialogue, the joint search for the truth and reconciliation. After all, the administration of justice alone – however good – does not yet lead to reconciliation, and this is desperately needed so that the men and women of the Western Balkans can finally start building on their future.

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Madam President, I think this debate is a timely one and that Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck's report includes a number of important recommendations. It gives me the opportunity to raise an issue which is central to our policy towards the Western Balkans.

The work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is an essential element in rendering justice, coming to terms with the past and moving forward. It is also key to strengthening the rule of law in the region. This can be a slow, and at times difficult, process, but the ICTY has made important progress. So far, it has completed proceedings against 116 accused with very different verdicts. Only two of 161 indictees remain at large.

When the ICTY was set up in 1993, the domestic judicial systems in the former Yugoslavia were unprepared for dealing with crimes of this scale. Yet it was clear that they had to be addressed. No contract, no agreement, no society can be sustainable without justice. Our strategy towards the region is to assist in stabilising the countries of the Western Balkans and helping them realise their EU perspective. A central element of that policy is cooperation with the ICTY. We support its mandate in several ways.

Firstly, the countries of the Western Balkans are part of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). This process depends on respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, human rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, fundamental freedoms and the principles of international law and regional cooperation. It also depends on full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. SAP conditionality is monitored through the annual progress reports prepared by the Commission. The next progress reports will be published in October 2009.

In addition, human rights and rule-of-law issues, including strengthening the functioning, impartiality and responsibility of the judiciary system, and the fight against corruption and organised crime, are key priorities of the EU's European Partnership with the countries of the Western Balkans. These are updated on a regular basis.

Furthermore, the Council has adopted two common positions aimed at supporting the implementation of the mandate of the ICTY by imposing an assets freeze on indicted fugitives and a travel ban on persons assisting ICTY indictees to evade justice. These common positions are regularly extended and updated.

The European Union will support the work of the ICTY until it has been completed. I entirely agree that in the longer term, the legacy of the ICTY must be preserved. Whenever this happens – and it is not a matter for the EU to decide – the domestic judicial systems will need to be ready to take over the ICTY's files. This is one of the reasons why the emphasis we have placed on judicial reform and good governance in the SAP is so important.

The work of NGOs and individuals, such as the Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade and the Research and Documentation Centre in Sarajevo, who are seeking the truth, also deserves our full support.

Let me close by thanking this Parliament for your support in this area and, in particular, for this helpful and constructive report.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS

Vice-President

Olli Rehn, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I welcome the initiative and report by Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck. This initiative and report send a very welcome signal about the commitment of the European Parliament to support the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

For the Commission, it is clear that the international community must maintain its full support for the ICTY to complete its remaining tasks. There can be no impunity for war crimes and, as you well know, full cooperation with ICTY is a condition for making progress in European integration. This necessary condition affects the EU accession process of Serbia today and it has affected Croatia. I hope it will not affect Croatia again, on condition that Croatia maintains full cooperation with ICTY.

This principle also includes the handling of war crime cases that are referred back to domestic jurisdiction by the ICTY. We have provided financial support and we are intensifying our support and efforts at capacity-building in this important field, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina which has by far the largest caseload.

The Commission has recently approved funding for a project initiated by Chief Prosecutor Serge Brammertz on internships in his office to train visiting war crime prosecutors and young professionals from south-east Europe.

We are also working with Chief Prosecutor Brammertz on other projects including a regional conference for war crime prosecutors from the Western Balkans. That will take place in Brussels in early April, next month.

All in all, the Commission remains fully committed to ICTY and continues to support Mr Brammertz and his dedicated colleagues in efforts to bring to justice those who are responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law and thus we want to support this important work contributing towards reconciliation and the maintenance of peace in the Western Balkans.

I look forward to continuing to work together with Parliament in this regard.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (NL) Madam President, I should like to extend warm thanks to Mrs Neyts for the completeness of her report. She is right in saying that Parliament should indeed set out its priorities very clearly. War criminals should not be exempt from punishment. All countries in the region must lend their full cooperation, and the International Criminal Tribunal should be given the chance to conclude its activities with due care.

Madam President, clearly, the Court in The Hague, with 116 finished cases and much work in the region, can submit a very fine result. Nobody can claim any longer that the guilty get off scot-free. I am also pleased with the emphasis that is placed on the full cooperation that is to be given to the Court. This applies to all countries from which suspects hail. The people that are still on the run should be brought to justice, and all the countries in that region have given their word to the European Union to this effect. We would not be credible if we did not hold firm to this. In fact, with the rapporteur's consent, I will table an oral amendment on this matter tomorrow.

Madam President, the Court's value is considerable, not least because there is still so much work to be done in the judicial system in the Balkans. This is why it is also good that this report stresses the importance of the proper functioning of an independent and impartial justice system. This is, after all, one of the Copenhagen criteria.

I would like to make two points. With regard to the deadline of 2010 or 2011, I take the view that we should not be so strict. It is, after all, far more important that the Court can continue to function after this deadline if necessary to bring certain aspects to a close.

Secondly, as regards completion, even with the arrest and trial of Messrs Mladić and Hadžić, the Court's work will not be finished. The residual mechanism and the International Criminal Court can take over, but good and less good experiences should never be lost, in my view.

Richard Howitt, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Madam President, since its establishment in 1993, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) has fundamentally reshaped the role of international humanitarian law and has provided the victims of the tragic Balkan conflicts, who would otherwise have gone unheard, with an opportunity to voice the horrors that they and their families experienced and to seek justice.

The ICTY has shown that no one, whatever their position or status at the time of the conflict, is immune from justice – a precedent that now sees the International Criminal Court promote respect for human rights across our world.

Today, we reiterate that, for the former Yugoslavia, there can be no impunity for those indictees who are still being sought. Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić are still renegades from justice and must be handed in.

We should also give our full support to Chief Prosecutor Brammertz's call for the necessary documentation, vital to the case against the former General Ante Gotovina and others, to be made available to the Tribunal – an issue that our Croatian friends, amongst others, know is pertinent to the EU accession process.

The Socialist Group has proposed two amendments to plenary. Firstly, that it should be made clear that any proposals for a possible mandate extension should not divert attention from the key task of completing trials and moving towards the earliest possible closure. Secondly, we appeal for free access to the ICTY's archives by prosecutors, defence counsel and, eventually, historians and researchers.

I thank the rapporteur, and I commend these amendments to the House.

Sarah Ludford, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, we need to support, to its conclusion, the impressive work of the Hague Tribunal in bringing perpetrators of terrible crimes to justice and not impose an artificial cut-off, because time pressures would prejudice fair trials while shortcuts would harm the safety of witnesses. While many lower-level cases have been successfully transferred to national courts, some of them may be unable or unwilling to conduct criminal proceedings in accordance with international standards, which means that transfers are sometimes being resisted by victims and witnesses.

In order to permit the continuation of the ICTY's mandate, we urge the Council to encourage the Security Council to provide sufficient resources from its general budget, not least to be able to retain key specialists and highly qualified staff. The Tribunal must leave a sound legacy, both as a model for other potential ad hoc tribunals and in order to contribute to the strengthening of justice in the Balkan countries.

There is a need for increased EU support for domestic war crimes investigations and trials and for the Copenhagen criteria to include even more support for a well-trained and high-performing judiciary, but the legacy of this is that the Tribunal must also contribute to reconciliation and inter-ethnic understanding, and the work of NGOs deserves more resources.

Commissioner Rehn reminds us that full cooperation with the ICTY is a condition of EU accession but the truth is, as Commissioner Orban candidly told me last night in the absence of Commissioner Rehn, that there is no unanimity in the Council as to what that means. That has led to confusion and a consistent postponement of deadlines. Much as we all want Serbia and Croatia to join, the Council, Commission and Parliament must be united and firm in saying that indictees like Mladić and Hadžić must be delivered and, in the case of Croatia, evidence and witnesses facilitated. We cannot afford to relax these conditions.

Jan Marinus Wiersma (PSE). – (NL) Madam President, I should like to bring up a few points in this brief debate. The work of the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is of eminent importance, not only because it guarantees that those responsible for the war crimes in the Balkans are brought to justice, but also because it serves the public's sense of justice. Moreover, the Tribunal plays an important role in European policy with regard to the Western Balkans. This is something that is also stressed in Mrs Neyts's report.

Now that the end of the Tribunal's mandate is in sight, we have to think about bringing its work to a close. In my group, what is paramount is that the capacity is kept at the same level to finalise the cases that are still in progress and to bring the last two suspects who are still on the run, Messrs Mladić and Hadžić, before the Tribunal.

Indeed, we should not at any time want to create the impression that the length of the mandate and its expiry will somehow mean that these people could remain at large. Whether this is done by extending the mandate or by creating a residual mechanism is not a question of principle for us, and as far as we can see, we can perhaps also find a way of putting the judges, the lawyers and the secretariat on a form of standby.

Véronique De Keyser (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, the European Union applies the principle of equal treatment to all of the countries of the Balkans.

If, on the one hand, we are insisting that Belgrade hands over Mr Mladić before the interim agreement on trade within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement can be implemented, it is clear that we are also asking for Croatia's full cooperation with the Tribunal.

However, this cooperation leaves much to be desired, to say the least. During the last visit by the Chief Prosecutor, Mr Brammertz, to Zagreb, in February, where he had gone to ask for the missing documents relating to the use of artillery in 'Operation Storm', which, for the record, resulted in the exodus of 200 000 Serbs and the death of 350 civilians, the Prosecutor demanded Croatia's full cooperation and, although the European Commission has just given the green light to opening Chapter 23 on the judiciary and fundamental rights, some European governments will not hear of it, nor will the European Parliament.

There will, in fact, be no support for us in the Balkans without a guarantee of peace, and the best guarantee is truth and justice for the crimes of the past.

I should like to congratulate Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck on her report, which received unanimous support within the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE). – (RO) I congratulate the rapporteur, Mrs Neyts, and I welcome the report on the mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, a report which I have also contributed to with a few amendments and which raises a series of real issues which we have a duty to consider.

We must ensure that the results achieved so far by this tribunal in punishing war crimes and promoting reconciliation in the Western Balkans are effectively utilised. The tribunal's work must be fully completed. It is also necessary to assess the results achieved so far, especially the objectives which have not yet been attained. Based on this assessment, the Council should consider extending its mandate for as long as required.

Certainly, this tribunal will not be able to continue its work indefinitely. This is why we need to ensure that there will be a mechanism in place to carry on the residual functions which are not met at the moment, for as long as required. In this respect, I welcome the proposal to the United Nations Security Council aimed at setting up an institution with this in mind.

Another measure which I feel is crucial to the development of sustainable institutional facilities in the Western Balkans is the creation of a set of regulations and evaluation criteria for judicial systems in these countries in order to support national courts.

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has made a significant contribution to the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans and has helped to bring about the restoration and maintenance of peace in the region. It has also contributed to the creation of the foundations of a new world standard for conflict resolution after the end of a war. It should, however, be emphasised that support for development of the potential of national judiciary in the Balkans is a fundamental matter, so that local courts will be able to continue the work which the Tribunal has begun. Proper cooperation between courts and prosecutors in the Western Balkans is another important challenge, especially in cases involving extradition and mutual legal assistance. There is also an obvious need to introduce mechanisms which will ensure that after its closure, the functions of the Tribunal and the material it has produced will strengthen the principles of states governed by law.

Finally, I should like to appeal to the countries of the Western Balkans, and to the countries of the EU, to support the work of non-governmental organisations and also of other institutions which help victims, propagate dialogue and understanding between ethnic groups, and which support efforts for reconciliation in the Balkans.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – Madam President, in conclusion, I would like briefly to reiterate our full support for the ongoing work of the ICTY as an important part of the healing and reconciliation process in the Western Balkans, now and in the future.

Let me just mention that we will be having meetings with the Chief Prosecutor, Serge Brammertz, in Prague tomorrow. I agree that the Tribunal should be in a position to carry out its mandate, complete the ongoing trials and open new ones against the two indictees still at large. I also agree that the legacy of the Tribunal has to be preserved by strengthening the local capacity to deal with the outstanding cases. After all, these

are the cases which concern the Western Balkan countries and for which they themselves eventually need to take responsibility.

Olli Rehn, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I wish to thank you for a very concise but important debate and congratulate Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck on her report and initiative.

The ICTY is indeed an expression of European values of justice and the rule of law, and therefore this debate is so important. It is also an essential element of our enlargement policy in the Western Balkans.

On dates, I can only agree with the ICTY itself – that the dates in the tribunal's completion strategy are target dates only and not absolute deadlines, as correctly stated in Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck's report.

For the Commission, the crucial issue is retaining the support of the international community for the completion of the Tribunal's existing mandate so as to ensure that there will be no impunity for war crimes in the future.

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, *rapporteur*. – Madam President, I wish to thank everybody who contributed to this debate.

I also wanted to say that I have found with everybody who works or has worked at the ICTY a degree of dedication and commitment which I have seldom seen elsewhere. That has been a great pleasure.

That was all the more reason to come forward with these proposals.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, Thursday, 12 March 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Marek Aleksander Czarnecki (ALDE), *in writing*. – (PL) Mr President, the work of the Hague Tribunal deserves the permanent support of the European Union, mainly because of the creation of foundations for a new standard in conflict resolution, and also because of its significant contribution to the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans region.

In the light of the UN resolution calling for an end to the work of the ICTY, I agree with the rapporteur that the possibility of extending the mandate of that institution should be investigated. The continued work of the Tribunal is needed, if only because of the fact that many criminals remain at large, and a significant number of cases still require reliable examination.

It is my conviction that a key factor here is also the creation of a perspicuous mechanism of operation for the judicial system in the Balkans, which will assume the original functions of the Tribunal after its closure. In addition, I appeal to Member States to support the work of non-governmental organisations and also of other institutions which help victims, promote dialogue and understanding between ethnic groups, and support efforts at reconciliation.

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) Ten years after the dirty war unleashed against Yugoslavia by the USA, NATO and the EU, those guilty of crimes against its people are salivating over the thousands of people murdered, including women and children, and over the massive damage they caused in the Balkans. The report in question extols the Tribunal in The Hague which they set up in order to try their victims and exonerate the American and European imperialists of their crimes, a tribunal with fabricated charges, with parodies of trials, which resulted in the murder of the former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic. With unbelievable insolence, they are calling for its operation to be extended so they can set up new guilty parties and exert terrorist pressure on the people of Yugoslavia by calling on them to sign a declaration of repentance for defending their country and of subjugation to their European murderers.

Simply voting against this despicable report does not suffice. The Greek Communist Party has abstained from the vote. It refuses even by its presence to participate in the legitimisation of imperialist crimes by the European Parliament. In this way, it pays minimum homage to those who paid for the imperialist barbarity of the USA, NATO and the EU with their blood.

Real tribunals of the people will be set up and the real guilty parties and murderers in the USA, NATO and the EU, the centre left and centre right governments, will be judged and sentenced for their crimes.

14. Question Time (Council)

President. – The next item is Question Time (B6-0009/2009) to the Council.
Question No 1 by **Marian Harkin** (H-0040/09)

Subject: Improvement of quality, availability and financing of long-term care

Given the challenges that Europe is facing as a result of an ageing population, leading to an increasing number of people in need of care, combined with changes in size and composition of families, labour market changes and increased mobility which will all impact on the availability of carers, the Commission's Demography Report (SEC(2008)2911) recognised that such challenges would require a variety of policy responses including the strengthening of solidarity between the generations in terms of long term care, greater recognition for professional carers and, most importantly, greater support for family carers.

The Presidency has already indicated its priority with regard to paying greater attention to the improvement of quality, availability and financing of long-term care. What steps does the Council propose to take during its Presidency to support informal carers throughout the EU, many of whom already provide long-term care and indeed save our health services millions of euros in healthcare provision?

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – Let me react to Mrs Harkin's question.

The Presidency is fully aware of the importance of long-term care in the context of an ageing population. According to Eurostat, the population of over-65s in the EU will double between 1995 and 2050. In its conclusion of 16 December 2008 on public health strategies to combat neuro-degenerative diseases associated with ageing, the Council welcomed the work already carried out by associations that defend and support patients and their carers and called on the Member States and Commission to reflect together on support for carers and to consider ways of developing it further.

In addition, the Council also invited the Member States to establish, in cooperation with the stakeholders concerned, a national strategy action plan or any other measures aimed at improving the quality of life of patients and their carers, as well as to improve the distribution of useful information to patients, their families and their carers, in order to make them aware of the care principle and best practices that have been identified.

The Council also recommended that Member States should evaluate the complexity or redundancy of administrative procedures which confront patients and their carers and consider measures for simplifying them.

Moreover, in the 2008 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, transmitted by the Council to the European Council, Member States committed themselves to increasing access to quality services. To this purpose, they reaffirmed that the right balance needs to be struck between public and private responsibilities and formal and informal care, and that provision in a residential or community setting is to be preferred to an institutional setting.

The Council also called on the Social Protection Committee to continue to promote the sharing of experiences and exchange of best practice regarding the quality of long-term care, assistance to carers, the organisation of long-term care and the importance of integrated care.

The Presidency will carry on the objective of the 18-month programme of the Council in the field of public health and focus efforts at EU level on enhancing the exchange of experiences relating to healthcare and solidarity with carers, taking into account the health challenges created by our ageing societies.

The Czech Presidency will pay special attention to issues of community long-term care, informal family care, and the dignity and rights of older persons. The Presidency will organise a European conference on dignity and hazards for the elderly, which will take place in Prague on 25 May 2009.

The Conference will focus on the reform of social and health services to respond better to the needs and preferences of older persons and families and will deal, *inter alia*, with such issues as Community long-term care, family care, geriatric frailty, prevention of abuse and neglect of the elderly, and the role of municipalities.

The Presidency will also organise the European Conference called 'Social Services – a tool for mobilising the work force and strengthening social cohesion', which will take place in Prague on 22 and 23 April. The conference will pay special attention to growing employment opportunities in social services in the context

of population ageing, support for informal carers and the role of social services in active social inclusion and reconciliation of care and employment.

Priority attention will also be paid to independent living in the community. The conference should contribute to the exchange of best practices.

Let me conclude with the recent development in the area of taxation. The Ecofin Council reached an agreement just yesterday in Brussels that all Member States should have the option to apply reduced VAT rates on a permanent basis to domestic care services such as home help and care of the young, elderly, sick or disabled.

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). – I have been very encouraged by the Czech Presidency, particularly in the emphasis it has placed on the family. The Commission's report on demography, which shows that we have an ageing European population, is subtitled 'solidarity between the generations', but it is really within the family that we learn solidarity and that this is based on love and care.

I am also very glad that the Czech Presidency has identified respect for human dignity, because that principle is at the heart of care. I would like you to comment on that because, as far as I can see, in order for care to be delivered to those who are dependent on care in a way that respects human dignity, we have to keep that principle in mind.

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, I think it is a very good thing that efforts are being made to support relatives so that they can take over long-term care. Unfortunately, in reality, there are not enough relatives to do so. On the contrary, we need an increasing number of highly trained staff. Hence my question: what initiatives will the President-in-Office of the Council take to ensure that sufficient professionally trained carers are available? Has any thought been given to a form of harmonised training, as these are new initiatives?

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – Madam President, I thank Members for their comments regarding the Presidency's efforts to improve living conditions for the elderly. The problem of ageing is one which we all share; and we should approach this with some dignity.

It is, of course, true that many of those challenges remain in the national competences of the Member States but, at the start of the debate, I mentioned the two conferences. I think Member States could provide training and counselling opportunities to family carers. The development of high-quality education is a key factor for improving the quality of care, as are temporary replacement care and special leave for employees who look after family members. Here, flexible working time, part-time jobs and other care-friendly employment arrangements are important.

Finally, social protection for family carers is also important. The care provided by both informal and professional carers must be appreciated and organised by society. Economic security, therefore, is a prerequisite for ensuring the quality of care.

President. – Question No 2 by **Brian Crowley (H-0044/09)**

Subject: Unemployment in Europe

What initiatives is the European Council pursuing at present to combat youth and long-term unemployment in Europe?

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – I should like to thank Brian Crowley for raising the question. I think you are certainly aware that the Member States are, in the first instance, responsible for designing and implementing their employment policies. However, the Council has a number of responsibilities in the field of employment, including the annual adoption of the employment guidelines in accordance with Article 128 of the Treaty. Especially now that Europe is facing a financial and economic crisis, the Council is paying special attention to the employment policies of the Member States.

You specifically asked in your question about the current initiatives by the European Council to help combat youth and long-term unemployment in Europe. In December 2008, the European Council agreed on a European Economic Recovery Plan to provide a coherent framework for action to be taken at the level of the Union, as well as for measures adopted by each Member State, taking account of their individual circumstances. The European Council's conclusion stressed, in particular, rapid additional action by the European Social Fund to support employment, especially for the benefit of the most vulnerable groups in the population. The European Council undertook to evaluate the implementation of the plan at its upcoming March spring Council, indicating that additions or amendments to it could be made if necessary.

During the first half of 2009, the Czech Presidency is paying particular attention to employment measures also, within the context of the spring European Council. The spring European Council will consider the employment situation in the Community and adopt conclusions thereon on the basis of the Joint Employment Report adopted by the Council and the Commission.

The opinion of the European Parliament on the matter will be welcomed in view of the European Council in March. Based on the assessment of the European Council, the Council will adopt the guidelines on the Member States' employment policies. The present employment guidelines adopted last year, as well as previous versions, have consistently stressed the importance of tackling youth and long-term unemployment in the Member States.

Since the autumn of 2008, when the effects of the present crisis on employment started to be evident, the Employment Committee, which was established by the Council in accordance with Article 130 of the Treaty, has undertaken the new task of continuous monitoring of the Member States' employment situation. The committee's findings are being passed on to the Council.

Moreover, the Presidency has decided to organise the Employment Summit so as to maintain a platform for the debate and eventual decisions, and that will be held on 7 May. Topics for discussion will be confirmed after the spring European Council – so we are planning to have the orientation debate on this next week. It should also be mentioned in this context that during this year, the European Parliament and the Council, as the co-legislators, are evaluating and considering amendments to the European Globalisation Fund, an instrument aimed at the elimination of negative globalisation impacts, where job losses certainly belong, as well as decreasing the risk that redundant employees will become long-term unemployed. The aim is to avoid long-term unemployment by timely assistance to the employees affected through activation programmes, such as training, which would enable improved qualifications.

On the whole, promoting employment, including fighting long-term unemployment and youth unemployment, has always featured high on the agendas of the Council and of the European Council. The Presidency supports the implementation of the flexicurity principles. Their implementation to national policies, together with continuing structural reform, will help improve the situation of vulnerable groups in the labour market, which include the young, the elderly, the long-term unemployed and people with low qualifications.

The honourable Member can be assured here that during spring 2009, amidst the global financial and economic crisis and rising unemployment, this continues to be the case.

Brian Crowley (UEN). – I would like to thank the President-in-Office for his response. I think it is a tribute to the Presidency that they had planned an employment conference before we recognised or realised ourselves the seriousness of the unemployment arising from the economic crisis.

But in light of that employment summit that will be taking place, there are three key issues which have to be focused on and dealt with: firstly, not just using the European Social Fund merely for training but also to ensure that that training leads to actual jobs and is not just training for training's sake; secondly, ensuring that the Globalisation Fund is made more active immediately because the job losses are occurring now; and thirdly, and most importantly, encouraging our colleagues in the Council not to engage in national protectionism of jobs in their own countries to the detriment of jobs in other countries, since if we coordinate and cooperate, we have a better chance of success.

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Would the President-in-Office agree with me that the situation we are in is not akin to the 1930s, but more akin to the situation at the end of the Second World War, and that what we really need is something more akin to a Marshall Plan-type new input for recovery in Europe?

Would he agree, therefore, that there is potential for the European Investment Bank to get an investor, such as China, to lend money to the EIB to invest in Europe, which could then be refunded through the extra trade tariffs and VAT collected by the Union to whoever lent that money to the EIB? Would he agree that while the Employment Conference is welcome, we need some new thinking and something as dramatic as what happened at the end of the Second World War?

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, existing barriers to mobility are, without doubt, partly responsible for youth unemployment. We have excellent cross-border training programmes, including for apprentices, but the barriers in the field of social rights and health insurance mean that all this potential for

mobility and additional training abroad cannot be used. What is the Council Presidency doing to counter this?

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Madam President, I think there are two separate points, one from Mr Crowley and one from Mr Mitchell. I think we need to avoid the various protectionist temptations here which could even lead to growing unemployment in various Member States. The national solution should not be to the detriment of the neighbours and the price for it should not be paid by future generations.

We need to have measures and to react to the current situation, and we are trying to do this. I agree with Mr Mitchell that we need a plan, yes, and we have some plans. We have the European Economic Recovery Plan and we need to implement it. Of course, we are in discussion with and working with the European Investment Bank. Its President Maystadt held a conference two days ago at which he demonstrated how much the EIB had spent since the crisis started – about EUR 10 billion more than in the previous year. There is another initiative by the EIB, together with the EBRD and the World Bank, to allocate resources amounting to more than EUR 24 billion to cover the needs of the various SMEs, for example. That is important in maintaining employment.

Regarding the revision of the regulations on the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Fund, an agreement on the proposal for a revision of the regulation on the European Social Fund, simplifying the recording of the expenditure and increasing payments on account to the Member States, has been reached in the Council. Currently the Parliament's position is awaited and the revised regulation could enter into force in May 2009.

President. – Question No 3 by **Mairead McGuinness** (H-0046/09)

Subject: Disparity in global production standards

Europe imposes high standards, which we all applaud, on food production and manufacturing inside its borders but does not require these standards to be met by imports. European standards, particularly for food production and the manufacture of clothes and toys, are the best in the world; but these high standards add costs and make production inside EU borders more expensive. Imported products, which are not subject to the same high environmental and other standards, are placed on our shelves, often at much cheaper prices.

What is the Council doing at the WTO and other global fora to raise awareness and encourage higher production standards around the world, giving better protection for workers and consumers?

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – I appreciate another question again from the Irish MEPs – it looks like the Irish are most active during Question Time here.

So, concerning the initiative at the WTO to raise awareness and encourage higher production standards around the world, let me first of all remind the honourable Member that the Commission is the main trade negotiator of the European Community at the WTO, acting on the basis of the mandate given by the Council. Therefore, we would need Commissioner Ashton here.

Regarding production standards, Article 20 of the GATT allows governments to act regarding trade in order to protect human, animal or plant life or health, provided they do not discriminate or use this as disguised protectionism.

In addition, there are two specific WTO arrangements dealing with these issues: the sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures and technical barriers to trade (TBT) agreements.

The SPS is a separate agreement containing basic rules on food safety and animal and plant health standards. It allows countries to set their own standards, provided that these are based on science. The TBT agreements oblige the WTO members to ensure that technical regulations, voluntary standards and conformity assessment procedures do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade.

Members of the WTO are therefore encouraged to use international standards, guidelines and recommendations where these exist. They may take measures which result in higher standards only if there is a scientific justification for doing so.

The European Community imposes high-level standards through which we protect our consumers. However, we must ensure that the required standards are not in conflict with the agreements mentioned above.

We all know that there are different viewpoints on these issues and that the European Community has been many times on the defensive side of a dispute over such measures.

In the Community's view, good regulatory practice can, among other things, help to avoid unnecessary obstacles to international trade and make sure that legislation is not more trade-restrictive than necessary. At the same time, it can defend the right to set public policy objectives, for instance, in relation to human, animal and plant life and environments at levels it considers appropriate, provided these are not applied in a manner which would constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination.

In the current context of the financial turmoil and economic meltdown, the importance of full compliance and effective implementation of all WTO rules and agreements cannot be over-emphasised.

The European Community has been working towards strengthening the international standards within the relevant WTO committees, in particular, the TBT, SPS, TRIPS, trade and environmental committees. A recent case which may be mentioned is the hard stance of the European Community in the SPS committee at the end of February on the issue of some members' non-compliance with the standard of the World Organisation for Animal Health.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – I would like to thank the President-in-Office for the detailed and technical response, but let me give you a practical example which may focus your mind. In a few years, the European Union will ban the production of eggs from caged systems. However, the system will still be used outside of our borders and we will import liquid egg or powdered egg from those cages that are banned in the European Union, and producers wonder at the logic of all of that.

I ask you, as a man who is quite logical and detailed in your responses, how do you argue the case for that type of system unless we say that you cannot import the liquid egg or the powdered product coming from a caged system? It is ridiculous to ban it internally.

Jim Allister (NI). – Minister, I think the key focus of the question was that of competitiveness and how we retain competitiveness for EU producers. Given that EU producers, particularly of food, have the extra costs of meeting EU standards and, at the same time, compete with imports from countries that do not, in those circumstances could I ask you whether you are persuaded that the CAP should be used to fund maintaining the competitiveness of EU producers? Without that funding, we are going to suffer exactly the fate that Mrs McGuinness has referred to.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – I am not among the greatest defenders of the CAP. I am generally in favour of continuing reform of the CAP, but I hope that we will not be in a situation of importing liquid or dried egg. Also, I believe that most of the EC's standards regarding placement on the market are based not just on what we have agreed here in Europe but on the internationally agreed Codex Alimentarius standards and the UN Economic Commission for Europe standards. It is important that everybody follow certain standards, and that we do not create the conditions which would seriously undermine this.

TBT agreements oblige the WTO and its members to ensure that technical regulations, voluntary standards and conformity assessment producers do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade.

President. – Question No 4 by **Claude Moraes (H-0047/09)**

Subject: Climate change

What preparations is the Council making in the run up to the G8 summit in July and the climate change conference in Copenhagen later this year in order to move international negotiations forward on climate change? In particular, can the Council report on any improved cooperation between the EU and the new US Administration in this area?

In addition, what further action in the fight against climate change is the Council planning in order to consolidate the package of measures agreed upon in December?

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – In December 2008, the Poznań Conference agreed on a work programme for 2009, which clearly identified steps towards the Copenhagen Climate Conference to be held in December 2009. Poznań has also sent the message that the current financial crisis is not to be seen as an obstacle to further action on climate change, but instead as yet another opportunity for transforming profoundly our economic system and moving toward a low-carbon economy.

That being said, we have to be aware that we will not have an easy time in doing so. The economic downturn will affect the willingness of the stakeholders involved to absorb additional costs related to the reduction commitments, as well as mitigation and adaptation measures.

The Czech Presidency intends to pursue efforts at international level towards a successful agreement in Copenhagen in December. As you know, as a follow-up to the Commission communication called 'Towards a Comprehensive Climate Change Agreement in Copenhagen' and on the basis of the input of the Temporary Committee on Climate Change set up by the European Parliament, the Council adopted conclusions on this issue last week, thereby further developing the EU position on a comprehensive post-2012 agreement.

The forthcoming European Council is also expected to agree key political messages. In addition to the shared vision of the long-term action on mitigation and adaptation as well as technology, the identification of appropriate means for financing effective and long-term climate policies is key in the EU's position and will determine, to a large extent, the success of the Copenhagen Conference.

The EU has already started to engage in active outreach, not only with key negotiating partners and the main emerging economies, but also with the new US Administration, which has already signalled its readiness to engage again in a meaningful way.

The Presidency has had its first meeting with the new US Administration and plans to have further exchanges as soon as possible. Climate change will be one of the topics discussed during the informal EU-US Summit in Prague on 5 April. The first signals coming from Washington are, in any case, encouraging so it will be crucial to ensure good cooperation between the EU and the US in order for our positions to be as ambitious as possible and to ensure that, consequently, the major emerging economies will follow suit.

For the EU's efforts to fight climate change to deliver, it is absolutely crucial that we bring other major world CO₂-producing economies on board. It is for this reason that several of these countries have also been invited to the G8 meeting – South Africa, Egypt, China, India, Australia, Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia and South Korea.

As far as the climate and energy package is concerned, by reaching agreement on this package in December 2008, the EU sent a very strong political signal to all its negotiating partners in the world. Now we will start its implementation, which involves a lot of technical work.

Aware of the need to determine in further detail the criteria which the European Union would wish to apply in deciding to move from a 20% to a 30% reduction, the Council is currently considering the issues of complementarity of effort and of the adequacy of possibly developing country actions on the basis of the Commission communication. The relevant text is included in the Environment Council conclusions of 2 March 2009.

Claude Moraes (PSE). – What would Question Time be without our Irish colleagues and their effective and articulate contributions? I am speaking first now, but really to make a point to the Presidency.

The point behind my question is that we should be aware that our younger constituents in particular – and I am sure I am not the only one in this situation – want to urge both this Presidency in its mid-term, and also the Swedish Presidency, to look carefully at what the Americans are trying to do in ensuring that there is no conflict – and Mr Vondra did mention this – between tackling the urgent priority of the economic crisis, unemployment and so on, and encouraging action on climate change, promoting the climate change package and encouraging industries to be involved in the low-carbon economy.

I am not asking the world, but I should like to say: please, always be aware that they are not mutually exclusive objectives. Many of our younger constituents across the EU are telling our presidencies this very thing.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) Bearing in mind the effects of climate change such as the long periods of drought, the decrease in drinking water resources and the desertification of large areas of European territory, I would like to ask the Council if it is considering the development of a European irrigation system.

I believe that investment in agriculture must be a priority during this economic crisis. In addition, in terms of the European Union's trade balance, agriculture is an extremely important area and we must guarantee the availability of sufficient, accessible healthy food for Europe's citizens.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – I would like to recall for the Presidency-in-Office that at the Summit meeting last December, all Heads of State and Government agreed to a declaration which stated, *inter alia*, that, in the context of an international agreement on climate change in Copenhagen in 2009, for those who wished to

do so, part of the auction revenues would be used to enable and finance actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change in developing countries which have ratified the agreement, in particular, the least developed countries.

My question is very simple. Because Summit declarations do not appear in any Official Journal or on the record, before the end of your Presidency, Minister, could you put the full content of that declaration at last December's summit on the record here in the House? It is most important that we have a record of such important declarations.

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – I think it is in the conclusions of the Environment Council in early March. I do not have the papers with me so I will look carefully again. My feeling is that I have read this. We are ahead of the European Spring Council meeting and I would expect confirmation of all those ambitious goals.

I do not know – and this raises some other questions – whether we will come up with an appropriate amount of money to put on the table for funds to help the developing countries with mitigation and adaptation, because we are just at the beginning of our talks with the US and other partners and it would not make sense to show our cards right now.

The debate with the Americans is ongoing. The Deputy Minister of the environment met Carol Browner early this month and Martin Bursík, who is the Czech Minister for the Environment, is going to meet his partners in Washington – I think later this week or early next month – so there is already a dialogue.

Yes, of course, we need to find common ground. There is the economic crisis; there are those ambitious environmental goals. You are right that we can find a lot of synergies and there is no need to fight. If you read the European economic recovery plans, there are a lot of programmes which have a green cover or a green colour. At the same time, a lot of public explanation lies ahead. The conditions in the Member States of the EU are not necessarily always the same so I expect a lot of public work and public diplomacy lies ahead of us in this area.

President. – Question No 5 by **Liam Aylward** (H-0050/09)

Subject: Road safety

According to the priorities of the Czech Presidency, the high number of people killed on European roads requires an enhancement of Europe-wide effort to improve road safety.

What plans does the Presidency have to tackle this issue?

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – As the honourable Member has pointed out, improvement of road safety and reducing the high number of fatal accidents on Community roads are among the priorities of the Czech Presidency for the transport sector. This is not surprising, as we are the country located right at the centre of the continent. Traffic intensity and the related dangers are a top priority for us.

Sharing the same concerns as you and with a view to improving the current situation in the short term, the Presidency intended to hold a ministerial debate at a Council meeting in spring 2009 on future development in the area of road safety in the context of the preparation of a new action plan on road safety. However, in view of the fact that the Commission has indicated to the Presidency its intention to postpone the date of the adoption of this new action plan, the Czech Presidency considers this debate to be premature.

One example of concrete action under our Presidency in the field of road safety is a final negotiation between the Council and the Parliament on a proposal for a regulation concerning type-approval requirements for the general safety of motor vehicles. As you know, the Presidency and Parliament's representatives managed to reach an agreement concerning this proposal and the European Parliament adopted the regulation yesterday. The general safety regulation requires the mandatory fitting of electronic stability control systems on all vehicles, and an advanced emergency braking system and a lane-departure warning system on heavy duty vehicles. These new technologies can significantly improve vehicle safety and it is clear that road safety will benefit when they are introduced as the standard system on new vehicles.

Agreement at first reading will allow the obligatory introduction of electronic stability systems in new vehicles from 2011, one year earlier than foreseen in the original Commission proposal. Furthermore, the Council has just started the examination of the Commission's action plan for the deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in Europe and the associated proposal for a directive laying down the framework for the deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems in the field of road transport and for interfaces with other

modes of transport. Both items have as one of their goals the improvement of road safety through the application of information and communication technologies to the road transport sector.

The Presidency intends to invite the Ministers to adopt the Council conclusions on the action plan at the Council meeting in March 2009 and a general approach or a political agreement on the abovementioned proposal at the Council meeting in June 2009. The role of the ITS in the area of road safety will also be discussed during the informal meeting of transport ministers to take place in late April in Litoměřice in my country.

Intelligent Transport Systems and applications such as emergency call and driver hyper-vigilance systems, speed alerts and alcohol locks could make a considerable contribution to enhancing our road safety. Electronic stability systems and eCall alone could save up to 6 500 lives a year in Europe if they are fully deployed. Given the importance the Presidency attaches to road safety, it will examine any other proposals on these issues that the Commission may present shortly, provided the limited time available until the end of June allows it.

Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN). – (GA) There is another question from Ireland, though it is in our own language this time round. In your opinion, what are the biggest causes of the high number of deaths on the roads? Does the Czech Presidency intend to develop any new coordination between the different standards in place in the different European countries in relation to cars being in good condition. As well as this, do you think that more than just technology should be employed to reduce the number of deaths on the roads?

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The EU has not done enough to reduce road accidents. Road safety can be improved through investments in infrastructure, improving the behaviour of those involved in traffic and by compliance with road legislation.

The European Commission has come up with a proposal for a directive on cross-border enforcement in the case of fines issued for breaking traffic regulations. The European Parliament has voted for this. What stage are things at and what are the prospects of this dossier being approved by the European Union's Council?

Jim Higgins (PPE-DE). – Firstly, I would like to ask the Council if it accepts that what we need are specific targets for each Member State in relation to reducing the numbers of deaths and fatalities on our roads.

Secondly, would the Council accept that we need the enforcement of a system whereby, if an offence is committed in one jurisdiction, the offender can be prosecuted by the courts in that jurisdiction, even though the offender has returned to his or her native homeland?

Last, but by no means least, I welcome the Council's information in relation to the eCall system, but when will it be mandatory in all Member States? It is vital from the point of view of accidents, and particularly single vehicle accidents.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – First of all, I understand how these issues are very important during the election campaign because everybody cares about this road safety problem. I think we have to be aware of one thing, that the governments and the European Council in particular cannot be responsible for every single life on our roads. It is also and primarily the responsibility of the drivers behind the wheel.

But of course we need to focus on this issue and, again, for us it is among the priorities, so we need to move this discussion ahead. That is why we have selected this as one of the key items on the agenda of the informal Transport Ministers' meeting at the end of April and certainly, I will tell my colleague in my government, our Minister of Transport, how important this issue is for you, too.

The main topic of this informal meeting is the deployment of the Intelligent Transport System (ITS) in the EU. Road safety and security are certainly one of the six priority action areas which were identified by the Commission in this ITS action plan. We want to move the debate forward.

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 7.10 p.m. and resumed at 9 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS MORGANTINI*Vice-President***15. Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health (debate)**

President. – The next item is the Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I am very pleased to have been invited to make a statement to Parliament on the Green Paper on the EU Workforce for Health, adopted by the Commission on 10 December 2008.

That invitation comes at an opportune moment, as we are now approaching the end of the consultation phase, which will be closed at the end of this month.

It is clear that there are growing pressures on all EU health systems arising from an ageing population, health threats, as well as the rising cost of new technologies and patients' increased expectations – and all this against the background of a difficult economic situation.

Without a well-trained and motivated health workforce throughout the EU, the financial sustainability of European health systems will be threatened and health inequalities will increase.

As the European population gets older, so does its health workforce, and there are insufficient new recruits coming through to replace those who leave. We need to reflect on the reasons why young people are not motivated to become health workers.

This, coupled with the mobility of health professionals within and between Member States is creating common health workforce problems for most European health systems.

I expect a large number of responses to the Green Paper from the many stakeholder organisations in the field of health that have expressed concerns about this important issue.

I also look forward to receiving contributions from the members of this Parliament. Those will really facilitate our work and serve our common objective.

The analysis of the answers we receive will guide us in developing strategies at EU level to support the Member States in tackling these challenges.

The health workforce debate is distinct from the issues covered by the draft directive on patients' rights in cross-border healthcare.

Indeed, that proposal focuses on the rules and arrangements needed to provide access, in equitable conditions, to safe and high quality healthcare for patients moving across Europe.

The primary aim of the draft legislation is to enforce, in a fair and consistent manner, patients' rights as recognised by the European Court of Justice. It does not seek to regulate cross-border provision of health services, freedom of establishment or the mobility of health professionals.

However, that does not mean that the draft directive ignores safety and quality of care for patients seeking healthcare abroad – which is intrinsically related to the context in which healthcare is provided by health professionals.

In this respect, the draft directive sets out very clearly an essential rule, which is that, as regards cross-border healthcare, the rules of the country of treatment apply.

Let me also briefly mention other provisions, such as those in Article 5 of the proposal: Member States would commit to defining national quality and safety standards, to implementing them effectively and to making them public. Healthcare providers would provide all the relevant information to enable patients to make an informed choice – including details of their insurance cover or other means of personal or collective protection with regard to professional liability, which must be in place in all Member States, patients would have a means of making complaints and of receiving remedies and compensation when they suffer harm arising from the healthcare they receive.

With this set of principles and rules, I believe that the draft directive defines a clear relationship between the patient and the provider to ensure sound information as well as safe and quality care for European citizens who decide to travel to another Member State for treatment.

Let me also recall that, under the primary responsibility of my colleague Commissioner McCreevy, there is another important piece of EU legislation which regulates mutual recognition of qualifications for doctors, nurses, dentists, midwives and pharmacists. I refer to Directive 2005/36/EC, which is now in force. That Directive also provides for specific obligations for Member States as regards the exchange of information in the case of movement of health professionals. Those flows of data are facilitated by the use of the internal market information (IMI) system, which already allows for the electronic exchange of information on the five main health professions. Furthermore, an extension of IMI to all regulated professions is envisaged.

To conclude, tackling the challenges of the EU health workforce whilst ensuring financial sustainability of health systems will be one of the major tasks for Europe over the next decade. This requires a comprehensive policy approach, as no Member State can realistically find its own solution in isolation. The solution cannot simply be to attract health workers from developing countries, where the shortage is even greater.

To that effect, the Green Paper will allow for discussion and further definition of the issues at stake, leading to the design of common actions, where appropriate. I know that your expectations are high, and I count on your help in building solutions to support the invaluable contribution that health professionals make to the lives of each and every one of us.

President. – Commissioner, I have no doubt that you will have a very fruitful response from MEPs to your request for contributions to the Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health.

John Bowis, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Madam President, I would like to thank the Commissioner, both for giving up her evening to come and join us in this packed House, but also for bringing the message that she has brought. It is an important Green Paper and it should start a major discussion within this Parliament and beyond.

She raised one or two questions during her submission just now, including her question about why more nurses and doctors are not coming forward. If I may say so, I think that is half the question. The other half is why so many are leaving. The key to this will be to find ways of recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals. That goes particularly, perhaps, for nurses, but also for doctors and for other therapists and so on. I think we have to look at the career structures that we provide. We have to see how promotion is seen as a potential. We have to cut down some of the barriers within and between the professions. We have to ensure that the work environment is pleasant. It is going to be tough but it can be comfortable as well. We have to make sure that research facilities are available in Europe so we do not lose people abroad. Perhaps, above all, we have to listen to the sharp-end professionals. Too often – I know from when I have been in government and you know as a Commissioner – we listen to the top people and we do not go down to the beds and listen to the nurses and the doctors who are actually dealing on the ground. If we did more of that, then perhaps we would get more of our policy right.

I, of course, want to refer – as the Commissioner has referred – to my report, the Parliament's consideration of cross-border health. We said right from the beginning that important with that were the two measures that were not coming at the same time. One of them, of course, was patient safety and we do have a measure that has sped its way on the fast track to join us. This one is somewhat behind. It concerns the health professionals. We do need to have the health professionals providing that service – that back-up – to cross-border health to enable patients to move safely and with confidence. Indeed, standing here in Strasbourg, we think of the Strasbourg, Liège, Luxembourg example of where the reference network concept may be of great value in terms of both patients and training and research.

The Commissioner has referred to the movement of health professionals, and we need to look at ways of making that a reality without endangering patient safety. I think that certainly includes the issue of language tests, which are not an obstacle but must be a protective measure for patients. She has referred to the recognition of qualifications. That clearly is important, whether you are treated at home by an incoming doctor, or you are going abroad to meet a local doctor there. There are some professions – and chiropractice is one – where you have recognition in some countries and not in others. We need to look at ways of bringing those ancillary health professionals into the centre of our planning.

We also, of course, need to be sure we have patient safety in terms of doctors who are disciplined or struck off – doctors, nurses, any health professionals – and in my report, I call for this to be facilitated by the Commission. I think that is something we need to look at more.

The Commissioner rightly referred to the brain drain. It is tragic that we are not providing enough health professionals but go and grab them from the countries that can least afford it. If you look at the figures, we see, on average, 1 in 4 doctors and 1 nurse in 20 has trained in Africa and is working in OECD countries. It is partly that we as countries pinch them and it is partly our NGOs who also use them and recruit them in the country concerned, pay them more than they would be paid in their own countries. Therefore, they do not go back to work there.

All those things are important, Commissioner. We need to look at the safety of health professionals. We need to put needle-stick injuries and hospital acquired infections on our agenda, as well as assaults on staff. We know from talking to midwives recently about the difficulty of getting professional indemnity insurance. Those are some of the issues that I hope will be to the forefront in our discussions on this very welcome Green Paper.

Jules Maaten, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (NL) Madam President, I should like to endorse much of what Mr Bowis said a moment ago. The Green Paper we received from you, Commissioner, is a fine document. Needless to say, we cannot wait for the reactions to it, as is always the case with a Green Paper. These are, of course, partly predictable, but it is, in any event, useful to receive these, so that they can be incorporated in possible future legislation.

This Green Paper is important, seeing as it concerns a matter that needs to be dealt with. The Green Paper is the result of a controversy that arose over the proposals submitted by Mr Bolkestein at the time, and we welcome the fact that the Commission handles it in this way, with due care, with a Green Paper, and with ample room for debate, because there is, above all, much anxiety surrounding this issue, in my view. This is why I do not want to confine my contribution to the topic of health workers alone, because I think that we will discover the same fear of the unknown in the European dimension in healthcare in other areas too.

Much has been done in recent years in the area of public health in the European Union, both under your predecessors and with you, Commissioner; I should therefore like to seize the opportunity to congratulate you, Commissioner, on the stamp which you managed to place on this policy in a relatively short space of time. I did not think it possible in such a short space of time, and I think that we can all be proud of the way you managed to achieve this.

A great deal has been achieved in recent years, for example in the area of drugs for paediatric use, a matter in which respect the public is not even aware that there is a problem, but where a European solution is very much on the agenda, because Member States cannot resolve this on their own. It is precisely the economies of scale that come into their own here. I take the view that this also applies to other areas: to the policy on tobacco and discouraging smoking, for example, where the European Union leads the way, not only in the Union, but also beyond. In this instance too, it is precisely the economies of scale that make us effective. We are also very involved in cross-border care and the protection of patients' rights in Europe, also under the watchful eye of rapporteur Mr Bowis, and I hope and expect that we will achieve a positive result in that area too.

Each time, though, with each topic that is discussed, you notice that not only ministers, but also fellow MPs in national parliaments, are reluctant to further deepen European cooperation in the area of healthcare. With 27 different systems in the European Union, we are all convinced that our own healthcare model is the best. Anyone you talk to will convince you that their system stands out. This is, of course, impossible. You cannot have 27 different systems that are all the best all at the same time.

Needless to say, a great deal of thought has gone into such a system in each country. In each case, people and well-intended interests are involved. When finally a difficult balance is struck, the European Union suddenly comes storming in with an idea that we happen to think is the best. I can understand very well that this will meet with resistance.

In a few areas, however, precisely these economies of scale – for example, in the case of rare diseases – can benefit the patients and systems alike. There are plenty of reasons for more European involvement in the area of public health. Nearly 40 000 patients in Europe are waiting for organs, and every day, nearly ten people on these waiting lists die.

Every year, alcohol abuse claims 195 000 lives and costs the European economy EUR 125 billion. This is a matter that is probably best tackled not even nationally, but locally. There are also European trends, though, for example in the case of alcohol abuse among young people. We have to examine whether this should not be better addressed at European level after all. We are, however, being stretched on the basis of the present Treaty texts to tackle these problems.

We should nevertheless achieve more, for example – and this is where the value of a Green Paper lies – where the actual free movement of health services is concerned. I am convinced that if we faced up to all the problems, because there certainly are some, and came up with solutions, for example, to prevent medical blunders, or to enhance the legal certainty of patients, but also that of health workers, that eventually everyone would benefit, provided this free movement is organised in a responsible manner but becomes possible nonetheless.

If better cooperation in the area of organ donation and effective cooperation in the protection of pandemics – something I always bring up – are not addressed at European level, I am convinced that we will be faced with major problems if, some time in the future, a flu epidemic travels our way from Thailand. In actual fact, the Commission should, in those cases, be able to take crisis measures within 24 hours.

Finally, Article 152 is, to my mind, not up to standard after all when it comes to organising effective European action in future. If we were to consider changing the Treaty at some point in the distant future, we should, in my view, consider extending the legal basis for public health in a new Treaty.

Bart Staes, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (NL) Madam President, I should like to join Mr Bowis and Mr Maaten in congratulating the Commissioner on her Green Paper which is not a day, or even hour, too soon, in my view. The Commissioner said herself that a rise in the ageing population will indeed bring more pressure to bear on health systems, but also, and mainly, on workers. Indeed, anyone who takes the time to listen to the people working in the sector will know that the general working conditions are extremely tough, both physically and often also mentally.

Working in this sector demands a great deal from workers, and is often underpaid. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the turnover of staff in the sector is very high. It is also a fact that all too often, the contracts are very precarious, resulting in many people leaving the sector prematurely. In my judgement, the Union will therefore need to pursue a number of things in its policy: sustainable employment, a good working environment, safe work, no brain drain, and decent work.

The Commissioner was right to make reference to the directive which Mr Bowis is currently working on, the Directive on cross-border healthcare. In my contacts with people in the sector, however, they were also keen to point out the relationship between working as a health worker and the Working Time Directive. In the Working Time Directive, contracts, rather than the people, are now used to determine the duration.

I have found out that there are Polish doctors who work in Polish hospitals on normal contracts during the week, and travel to the United Kingdom during the weekend to do a 48-hour shift there. This is unheard of, of course. This is something that should be taken into consideration, certainly in the Working Time Directive. I therefore hope that this topic will also be addressed when we discuss the Green Paper.

Konstantinos Droutsas, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (EL) Madam President, the Green Paper on the European Workforce for Health reveals the plans of capital and of the European Union for privatising health and welfare, with painful consequences for working and grassroots families in the health sector.

These changes form part of the more general anti-grassroots reversals in social insurance and social services being promoted in all the countries of the European Union with the active support and complicity of the centre left and centre right forces, which treat health as a commodity, a source of profitability for capital, and patients and their families as customers.

The core objective is to extend the business activity of capital and construct a system in which public-sector health services operate on private-sector criteria, in competition with the private sector.

The first victims of this commercialised health system are the very people who work in this sector. 10% of the workforce of the European Union, these workers, often work under unacceptable conditions which are dangerous to patients. The constant violation of working times is probably the rule rather than the exception. Their pay, in the public sector at least, is being cut, as is their efficacy, due to the choices of private insurance companies. The central theme of the Green Paper is the mobility of workers and the application of the rules of the Bolkestein Directive in the health sector.

Health is a social value, not a commercial commodity. Health workers provide a social service and are not a means of generating profit. Only by fighting will the workers be able to secure a high standard of free services provided solely by the government, well away from any private business activity.

Kathy Sinnott, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Madam President, more people work in health than any other area. The groups of health workers we instantly think of are doctors, nurses, pharmacists and dentists, who are supported by radiologists, lab technicians, researchers, therapists, biochemists and an army of administrators and staff who keep health services functioning.

There is also a second group of professionals: the herbal physicians, chiropractors, osteopaths, homeopaths and nutritionists who focus on a more natural approach to health.

Lastly, there are the family carers, the largest single group of health workers who labour day and night without pay in the health sphere.

Going back to the first group, in this report, the Commission is concerned that the number of professionals working in mainstream healthcare is not sufficient to meet the needs of the growing demand. The Commission further stresses the need to attract young people to choose these professions. However, in some countries, this is not the problem.

In Ireland last month, 3 500 young people took an exam in the hope of securing one of a few hundred medical school places. Similarly, there will be far more young people applying for nursing, therapies, etc., than our universities are willing to train.

Commissioner, it is not a question of attracting young people. It is a question of allowing them to train. Our secondary students in Ireland are working towards a career in medicine, but it is, unfortunately, made unattainable by a rationing system that is out of touch with demand, which leaves us with severe shortages of qualified professionals.

I know that similar disconnects between training and demand exist in other European countries. I would suggest that, in working to attract young people to this profession, you will only frustrate them until we provide them with the opportunity to gain these skills.

Having not allowed these students to train and thereby creating an artificial shortage, we then, of necessity, bring in medical personnel from third countries – even the poorest countries – leaving their own people without medical help and creating a brain drain.

The second group of health professionals I mentioned, like herbal physicians, were unfortunately completely left out of this report. To leave them out fails to acknowledge the valuable contribution they make in keeping Europeans healthy and is out of touch with the wishes of many Europeans who seek their help.

This sector is very important. The Commission's apparent attempts to suppress it with directives, like the Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Directive, further compound this growing gulf between EU policy and people's everyday health choices.

Finally, I would like to make reference to the third and largest single group of health workers: the family carer. These are the people who care for dependant older people and those with disabilities. We need them more every year, not less. As Europe ages and the number of people with disabilities increases, we cannot take them for granted. The only way we are going to keep these essential carers is if we support them in their work.

Finally, our health force is more important than ever. The Commission is right to say that there are new and re-emerging threats to health, such as communicable diseases. Yet the Commission should also take careful note that every chronic disorder related to the immune system dysfunction is on the increase, for example, asthma, allergy, multiple sclerosis, autism, diabetes, epilepsy, fibromyalgia and many more.

I would advise the Commission to look at every one of these diseases that is on the rise and try to understand what is triggering these epidemics because, allowing them to increase unchecked and to affect more and more people, is both cruel and unsustainable.

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I welcome the Commission Green Paper and its objective of increasing the visibility of the issues around the EU health workforce and identifying challenges and action that can be taken.

However, I wish to take the opportunity to emphasise one aspect of the Green Paper, namely the training of the health workforce. I initiated Written Declaration 0095/2008 on this issue, which is ongoing. I strongly support the idea that it is absolutely essential to develop training communication courses for the health workforce in order to provide clearer and more complete information to patients. Patients' ability to understand health and medical issues and directions is closely related to the clarity of the communication. Despite various initiatives to improve the quality and the availability of health information, studies indicate that patients want more information than they currently receive and that health professionals tend to overestimate the amount of information that is supplied.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the shortage of healthcare staff is a global phenomenon. However, we feel this most acutely in our own back yard. The lack of specialised medical assistance, the lack of clinical experience in particular specialities and of specific medical services leads people to seek medical help in other countries.

It is therefore very important to regulate the principles of cross-border medical care. The patient has the right to know what standard of services is offered by specific centres, how the care will be financed, how much the healthcare system of the patient's own country will pay for treatment or rehabilitation, and how much the patient will have to pay. A directive on this matter is essential.

A further question is raising the qualifications of medical personnel, including help connected with language courses, which should aid mobility. I think the proposal to establish a reference network for health personnel is expedient. Commissioner, thank you for your Green Paper.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the promotion of a sustainable workforce for health across Europe is crucial in continuing our improvement in healthcare services and facilities across the 27 Member States.

Europe faces a number of challenges in sustaining and improving our healthcare services. The demography of the Member States poses a major issue for health workers as Europe's population ages and life expectancy increases by 2.5 years every decade. Increased pressures apply to the workforce because, as the population ages, so too do the workers. The key to maintaining an adequate workforce in the face of this imminent retirement is to ensure that there are sufficient younger recruits available to replace those who retire.

The importance of improved healthcare research and data across Europe cannot be stressed enough. At present, there is a lack of up-to-date, comparable data and information among the Member States on a number of key healthcare issues including training and employment of workers, age, gender and international flow of health professionals. The availability of Europe-wide information is immensely important for the planning and provision of future health workers and for all health authorities.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, it is very much in our interest to ensure that our healthcare system functions as efficiently as possible. It is therefore necessary, in accordance with the guidelines of the Green Paper, to raise the qualifications of medical personnel and to provide comfort and suitable working conditions for medical staff. We cannot allow doctors to be on duty for too long.

I would also like to draw attention to the question of health promotion. Promoting a healthy lifestyle is a good prophylactic method which can prevent a variety of diseases and illnesses. This is why, bearing in mind that prevention is better than cure, every kind of publicity and campaign promoting health should be supported. Let us remember that investing in any kind of innovative treatment method, clinical equipment and new technology amounts to investing in ourselves.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I wish to thank all the speakers for their valuable contributions. This shows that your contributions can be very helpful, because already some very important points have been made.

These include, for example, the question of how we can create the right work environment for workers in order to keep them in their home countries and, also, how we address the very serious problem of the brain drain.

I was in Liberia last week and was shocked to hear that for a population of 3 million, they have only 150 doctors. The rest of their doctors are all in the United States of America. This is a very big problem – not only for Third World countries, but also within the European Union, as there is a very serious brain drain from the east to the west. We have to see how we might possibly encourage health workers and health professionals to stay in their home countries. In order to do that, we have to create better work conditions for them.

Formal care cannot be addressed without taking into account the need for, and the capacity for, informal care, which we indeed reconcile in the Green Paper.

Mrs Sinnott raised the very important question of how to train more people and offer people more opportunities to train. That is the other side of the coin. On the one hand, we want more health workers, but on the other, we do not have the capacity to train them. All these are very important questions which we shall be able to answer and give solutions to once we collect all the important comments that you and other stakeholders make on the Green Paper. At the end of the process, we hope we will arrive at some solutions to the problem before it becomes truly insurmountable.

President. – The debate is closed.

16. 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, 16-22 March 2009 (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission on the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, 16-22 March 2009, by Mr Borrell Fontelles, on behalf of the Committee on Development (O-0026/2009 – B6-0015/2009).

Pierre Schapira, author. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in a few days' time a delegation from this Parliament will travel to Istanbul to take part in the 5th World Water Forum, an event which will bring together all the global players with an interest in water: UN agencies, development banks, States, professional organisations, NGOs and local authorities.

At a time when water is becoming an increasingly scarce resource and the pace of climate change leads us to expect more and more conflicts in relation to access to water, I wanted to prepare for this meeting by putting a strong text to the vote within our institution in order to lay the foundations for European action in this field.

The situation is serious, as you know. Water shortages have spread beyond the traditionally arid areas. Access to water, the quality of which is constantly deteriorating, has become a concern for all of us. The UN figures speak for themselves. One billion people do not have access to safe drinking water; two and a half billion people do not have access to sanitation; five thousand children under the age of six die every day from diseases caused by lack of clean drinking water or sanitation, or by their poor quality.

The scandal is that the first victims are always the poorest. Access to water, which will be one of the main challenges in the years to come, could further delay the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The next World Water Forum must be an opportunity to find solutions together to respond to this enormous challenge.

My first priority was to emphasise that water is a shared resource of mankind that should be a universal right. That is the first paragraph of the proposed resolution, and it is vital, because the policies we are implementing depend upon it. Remembering this basic principle means saying 'no' to making water a commodity, since, unfortunately, we know only too well the disastrous consequences of that.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report of 2006 shows there has been flagrant injustice. The lack of distribution systems has often resulted in a lack of safe drinking water for the most disadvantaged people. Consequently, millions of people have to resort to unofficial sources which, taking into account the intermediaries, charge prices that are five or ten times higher.

We are fighting for access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all. This means that water has to remain under public control, which alone can assert the common interest. It is this principle that should guide our policies, and I am pleased that the resolution makes reference to it.

Public intervention is indeed able to resolve this problem of access. A pricing system that is fair and sustainable for all would be both less costly for poor people than having to resort to the unofficial sector and would allow investment in the necessary infrastructures.

This goal can be achieved only if we all contribute to it. Public development aid must therefore be used together with the resources of local authorities, bank loans, private capital and innovative partnerships.

I should like, in particular, to stress the importance of financing based on solidarity, such as that made possible under the Oudin law in France. The latter allows local authorities to collect one cent per cubic metre from their users' water bills to finance international cooperative actions dedicated exclusively to water.

Is the Commission prepared, Commissioner, to encourage the development of this kind of instrument? Such development has to be done in accordance with the notion of the public good, and that is why I am pleased that the text of the resolution points out that public-private partnerships must be strictly defined and subject to regulation.

Since the last World Forum, the role of local authorities has been recognised by all the stakeholders, including members of Parliament and ministers. The next forum, in Istanbul, will stand out because of two major advances: the signing of an agreement by local authorities on water and the organisation of two days wholly devoted to the role of the local authorities.

Are you prepared, Commissioner, to make use of the enormous reserves of expertise and of human and financial resources of the local authorities to encourage the North-South Partnership? With their successful experience and their technical skills behind them, the cities of the North are keen to help their counterparts in the developing world.

Finally, the UN has today published a report on water that makes some frightening projections for the future. Under the double pressure of demographic growth and climate change, the water crisis has been made worse by the inadequacy of the political reaction. While water is the priority for all development policy, only 6% of international aid is devoted to it.

That is why I want Europe, our Parliament and the Commission to send a strong message to the people of the South, because this inequality of access to water cannot continue.

President. – I should like to make a brief personal comment: I sincerely hope that water will not cease to be a common resource and that it will be a right for all.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, first of all I would like to convey the apologies of my colleague, Louis Michel, for not being able to be here in person, as he is in the Congo. However, it is with great pleasure that I will take up the points, because they are so important.

The Commission fully agrees that water and sanitation service provision is naturally addressed at the local level, through local government, municipalities and communities. We have to recognise, however, that weaknesses exist between those different levels, most notably in weaker countries where the provision of basic services is not a strong priority.

Last year, the European Development Days here in Strasbourg focused on the role of local authorities, who are at the heart of access to essential services, as well as on the importance of local governance and the participation of citizens. This is obviously a central issue for the water sector and the Commission, through its different instruments, is working to increase support to local authorities and reinforce partnerships between local actors from the North and the South.

At EU level, European water policy is also based on the principle of good governance, encouraging the involvement and participation of citizens, local communities, NGOs and stakeholders. This is reflected not only in the Water Framework Directive but also in initiatives such as the EU Water Initiative launched at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which contains the reinforcement of the role of local actors among its objectives.

In Africa, where the Millennium Development Goals linked to water and sanitation are still not on track, investments need to increase, and the Commission has demonstrated its political commitment by creating a financial mechanism.

The Water Facility of half a billion euros has enabled mobilisation of double that amount through cofinancing of a large number of programmes to improve the water, sanitation and hygiene situation of millions of people. It has also improved water governance and management in ACP countries. The focus on the involvement of local actors has been one of the added values of this facility.

The EU will be represented at the Ministerial Segment of the World Water Forum by the current Czech Presidency. The statement that is being prepared includes references to the need for good governance through capacity development and institutional reform at all levels.

The Commission's policy, approved in 2002, promotes integrated water resources management in developing countries. It is in this framework that the different uses of water – such as drinking water, sanitation, irrigation etc. – have to be addressed, in order to reach an optimal allocation of benefits among all users.

Moreover, the best practices of different experiences of green belts around cities, particularly in Africa, are currently being analysed in the context of the 'Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel' initiative as part of a feasibility study supported by the European Commission. Further support to this initiative will be considered within the framework of the Africa-EU Partnership on Climate Change.

I am pleased to announce that the Water Facility will continue under the 10th European Development Fund and that EUR 200 million has been set aside for that purpose. Member States are invited to participate with additional funding.

The Commission's strategy is based on an integrated framework for collaboration with partner governments, EU Member States and all the stakeholders concerned.

The Water Facility complements the national programmes with its capacity to work with decentralised actors and develop innovative solutions. The ongoing preparation of the 10th EDF Water Facility identifies in particular the potential offered by public water operators, who provide over 90% of water and sanitation services globally.

Therefore, public-public partnerships potentially constitute a very cost-effective approach in terms of promoting the relevant 'good governance' principle in the ACP water sector, with potentially long-term and sustainable impacts on institutional and organisational change. Such 'twinning' partnerships – for instance through training and technical assistance – can be efficient ways to promote the principles of good governance in the water sector in ACP countries.

Finally, let me confirm that aid effectiveness and the division of labour are discussed with relevant partners within the mechanisms of the EU Water Initiative. A mapping of EU Development Assistance in the water sector has been carried out to improve that ongoing dialogue. The question of donor orphans is an important one in the water sector and the Commission intends to take this into account in the conception of the new Water Facility under the 10th EDF.

José Ribeiro e Castro, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, I would repeat the words spoken in this House several years ago, on 13 March 2006, by Eija-Riitta Korhola. She described the situation with regard to access to clean water as follows: 'The figures are alarming: 3 900 children die every day because of a lack of clean water. One fifth of the world's population, some 1.1 billion people, suffer from a lack of clean water. More than 40%, meanwhile, are without proper water and sewage services.'

Three years have passed since that statement and what has happened? What has happened is that the global scenario is worryingly exactly the same, which cannot fail to be cause for concern. We are now facing a serious crisis in basic sanitation that involves us all. I would point out that this problem particularly affects the poorest and least developed regions of the world, not least sub-Saharan Africa. This continues to be the area most affected by a lack of water quality, particularly in rural areas and in the slums that surround the major cities. However, the problem is vast. I have here with me a UNICEF brochure which dates from 2001. However, in the main, its statements still hold true and are striking. What does it tell us? It tells us that these 1 billion people are spread throughout virtually the whole world. These 1 billion people have no access to clean water: 4% in the Middle East and North Africa, 4% in Central and Eastern Europe, 19% in South Asia, 25% in sub-Saharan Africa, and 42% in East Africa and the Pacific. If we look at the figures within each of these areas, it is the regions of East Africa and the Pacific, and sub-Saharan Africa which present alarming numbers, with 24% and 43% of the respective populations still not having, at the beginning of the decade in 2000, any access to clean and safe water.

It is vital to remember the health complications, some of them fatal, which stem from this lack of water, and how these impact on the development and progress of the populations deprived of this essential good in terms of both quality and quantity, and also the border tensions caused by access to water and how these risk becoming more acute if nothing is done to prevent them.

The European Union, as a global player and as a contributor *par excellence* to the world effort to tackle this problem, cannot excuse itself from taking part in the major debates on this issue. I welcome the reports that the Commissioner has made to us in this House. I therefore also welcome the holding of and the European

participation in this 5th World Water Forum. This will provide another opportunity for all the main players to debate the issue objectively and to prepare a clear approach to this problem. I cannot do other than support this effort, as the whole Committee on Development has also done in the sense of promoting subsidiarity. Furthermore, as there are many responsibilities in this respect at local level, I also support the other concerns of our committee. Ladies and gentlemen, water is a good which is essential to life, to the life of each one of us and to the life of humankind.

Inés Ayala Sender, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (ES) Madam President, I am, on the whole, pleased that this 5th World Water Forum is to be held in Istanbul and, above all, that the European Union is to participate with a delegation from the Commission, and also one from the European Parliament. I also understand and endorse the need to support the local public authorities in their attempts to establish democratic, participative systems and improvements or innovations in water management, and also to support decentralisation processes.

The primary and fundamental aim of all this is to protect the fundamental right to water and sanitary services but, clearly, this must be within a rigorous framework of respect for sustainable development which, in the European Union, is set out in the Framework Directive on water as a reference point, with the Millennium Development Goals as the basis for development.

I must say that all this – and I will set this out tomorrow in an amendment which I hope this House will adopt – was the subject of debate last autumn at the Zaragoza International Expo 2008 which, in addition, was the first time that the European Parliament participated alongside the Commission on equal terms. At the Expo, over 2 000 experts, in the Water Tribune, and NGOs, in the forum named the Agora, as well as the delegations from the Commission and Parliament, debated and generated an enormous volume of debate and very interesting, creative proposals on water management.

This took on a permanent form in the ‘2008 Zaragoza Charter’, adopted on 14 September 2008. This contains 17 points, some of which I would like to highlight. The Charter states:

- ‘that access to drinking water and sanitation is a human right that must be guaranteed by all public authorities’;
- ‘that access to water has an enormous influence on development’;
- ‘that forecasts show that climate change is capable of modifying the availability and demand for water all over the planet’;
- ‘that the sustainable production of food is directly linked to the efficient use of water’.
- ‘that river basins are the best suited environments for harnessing water and their good management makes it possible to resolve conflicts between countries, regions and users’; and, finally,
- ‘that the public authorities must take the initiative in promoting the legislation and arrangements required to ensure access to water by all’.

I call upon the Commissioner to take into account the conclusions of the Zaragoza Charter, in the drafting of which we, the Commission and Parliament, participated, alongside experts, NGOs and associations, and that, in fact, it constituted a forum for preliminary debate in view of the 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul.

I believe that it is worthwhile incorporating the conclusions of the Charter and also of the Water Tribune into the European discussion and debate materials that we, as the European Union, are displaying at the pavilion at this international expo.

Roberto Musacchio, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, two years ago, we held a debate in this House and adopted an exacting resolution on the subject of water on the occasion of the Fourth World Forum held in Mexico City. We wrote then that water must be considered a human right and that active policies must be developed to realise this right through forms of public-private cooperation, focusing, in particular, on local communities.

Unfortunately, that resolution was not supported by the European Commission, which was present in Mexico City – I would remind the Commissioner of this today – despite the fact that it was widely praised by many countries, especially in Latin America. The very nature of this kind of forum, a private structure, unfortunately prevailed. We now have the opportunity to send a parliamentary delegation to Istanbul, and it would be

advantageous if our presence there were supported by an equally strong resolution as that of 2006: we are not quite there yet, which is why I am tabling these amendments.

We need to reach a real turning point on the water issue. The terrible statistics on water shortages are well known, and they are destined to get worse as a result of climate change. Indeed, it is in the area of climate change that new action is needed. Climate change is making access to water more difficult, and poor water access in turn aggravates climate change. So, as well as the rights issue, and that of public-private collaboration, we also have to look at building a strong relationship with the Kyoto Protocol. It is the UN that must be involved at the heart of matters concerning water. A dedicated UN body could be entrusted with global water governance, removing it from the private philosophy still present in the current forum. This would encourage connection with the important conventions on climate change and desertification that form part of the UN framework.

Appropriate finances will then, of course, be required. These could come from general taxes and charges, for example, on mineral water which – I would like to point out to my fellow Members – we use to excess even in this Parliament. The privatisation of water must be opposed: it would make access to a vital resource no longer a right but a market. I believe that the whole history of Europe teaches us that it is the public that has guaranteed the right to water in our homes, which does not happen on other continents increasingly prone to infiltration by the private sector.

These are practical matters, but they also have enormous moral importance. It is not by chance that the right to water is championed by large secular but also religious movements and celebrities. Recently, and many times over the last few years, the European Parliament Chamber has been made available – rightly, and I thank the presidents for this – for important meetings of global activist organisations. At the latest of these, the idea was put forward of a true protocol on the right to water, which I am convinced we should all support.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, the majority of us can take free access to water for granted. We use large amounts of water every day. It is worth remembering, however, that according to estimates of the World Health Organisation, one sixth of the Earth's population, that is to say, over one billion people, do not have access to water which meets basic, minimal standards of cleanliness. This means that in the civilisation of the 21st century, millions of people are suffering thirst and dying as a result of diseases caused by drinking contaminated water. Recently I was in Lagos, the largest city in Africa, where barely 1% of the people have access to running water.

Statistics of this type are horrifying, but nonetheless the problem of water does not make the front pages of newspapers, does not excite the general interest of the media, and is not the subject of discussions and disputes, as is the case, for example, with AIDS, the fight against malaria or global warming. This surely results from the fact that the problem concerns only 2% of Europeans, whereas it concerns 27% of people in Africa. It is estimated that in Africa alone, more people die each year from diseases caused by drinking dirty water than from AIDS and malaria put together.

It can, therefore, be said that lack of access to drinking water does not kill in a spectacular way likely to be given prominence in the media, and does not generate as broad interest as a disaster like an earthquake, a tsunami, flooding or armed conflicts. As Mr Ribeiro e Castro has already said, however, the facts are that, on average, every day 6 000 children die from diseases caused by a lack of water. This means that one child dies every 15 seconds. Can you imagine the reaction of the world, the response, the degree of mobilisation and determination, if this were happening in Europe, and not in Sub-Saharan Africa or Asia?

Consequently, the problem of access to water is not only a problem for developing countries, but also for developed countries. Universal access to drinking water is an essential condition for the development of countries and the fight against poverty. Unless this need is met, there is no point in talking about improving healthcare or developing education. Unless water for the needs of farming or simple industry can be guaranteed, whole societies are condemned to a battle for daily existence. This leads to armed conflicts, migration and destabilisation. In other words, it hinders development and increases developmental inequalities.

Politicians will also be present at the Forum we are debating. They will discuss matters of current importance. One of these matters is the situation in Darfur, where President al-Bashir is expelling organisations which, among other things, have been helping to ensure that the people of Darfur have access to water. There will therefore be an opportunity to persuade, amongst others, President al-Bashir, to allow international organisations to supply water to the people of Darfur.

Giulietto Chiesa (PSE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, would like to remind you as Mr Musacchio did, that in February, this Parliament, together with Mikhail Gorbachev's World Political Forum, hosted a conference with a meaningful title: 'Peace with Water', a conference that produced a memorandum for a world water protocol that deserves serious consideration and was, moreover, supported by all the major political groups in this Parliament, but which seems to have been ignored by the Committee on Development, which drew up this document.

I do not think this was by accident: the text we are debating today in fact appears weak and vague on all the crucial points that will be on the agenda in Istanbul. Take the example of water as a fundamental human right. If it is a right – and it is absurd to deny it – then it cannot also be a commodity. A right cannot be bought or sold in a free society. A right is only bought in a society of slaves. We are well aware, however, that the giant private interests want to take possession of this right. So what will Europe say at Istanbul? Who, as it says for example in recital J, needs to increase the financial priority of water? That is a prime example of ambiguous wording. Furthermore, is the state, or public ownership, the sole player in water policy? Or, as it says in paragraph 12 of the resolution, is it the 'major player'? What does this phrase really mean? For the rest, it contradicts paragraph 2 of the same document, where it is rightly stated that water is a 'public good' to be kept 'under public control'.

In short, we are in the midst of a general crisis in our society's model of development yet we are still clinging to an idea of the market that appropriates nature itself for private gain. Lastly, there is another very weak point: the document contains no organisational proposal for world water management. The aforesaid memorandum did, however, outline a proposal for a world agency, which is repeated in one of the amendments that I will support with my vote.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, the 5th World Water Forum is an event which should be an opportunity to work on systems of public water management which will be effective, transparent, regulated and in keeping with the objectives of sustainable development for meeting the needs of society. A special role and special tasks in this area await local authorities. In addition, the food crisis has shown a need for the development of new techniques, such as for the irrigation of farming areas. At the same time, it is important to ensure that natural fertilisers are used, or fertilisers which are rapidly broken down in the soil and do not pass into underground waters.

Finally, how does the Commission intend to act upon the will of the European Parliament expressed in its resolution of 15 March on the Fourth World Water Forum, concerning support for and ways of jointly financing water management? The problem of water is the most important challenge faced by the world and by Europe.

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, my fellow Members are right, the figures are alarming and warrant serious reflection. Many, too many, people in the world are still denied their fundamental right to water. In recent years, regulation in this field has been significantly extended. At Istanbul, I would, however, like to see attention drawn to the need to rationalise the many international bodies that play a part in the governance, direction and control of world dynamics associated with water, whose activities and competences often overlap at present. This reform can be deferred no longer.

I also hope that the 5th World Water Forum will recognise the concept of water as a global public resource and that this idea will gain support, with consequent appropriate policies on its protection, on public ownership and on usage and distribution procedures.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I think that, together in this House, we have been repeating the same things for years.

I think everything has already been said about water, about this shared resource of mankind, and, unfortunately, it has to be said again because the situation is far from improving, rather the opposite. The latest United Nations report shows that, in fact, the situation seems to be getting worse. I therefore think that, despite the proposals that have been made and the policies that have been conducted by the European Union, which are a first step forward, we really need to go further than that because, without water, there is no life. We must also be aware that many populations, particularly countries we trade with and have dialogue with, have had their water supplies cut off or still do not have access to drinking water.

This is absolutely inadmissible and unacceptable. In my opinion, we really must support – and I think that the European Union must provide support at international level and at Istanbul – the status of water as a

shared resource of mankind. It is not a commodity which can be sold or which could be sold by our multinational companies. That is really what we must fight for at Istanbul, and I think that our fellow Members will fight for it.

John Bowis (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I have listened to my colleagues quite rightly highlighting the shortage of water, lack of access to water, the diseases that come from that. All that is fundamentally important for this water forum.

I just wanted to raise the other side of that coin because those of us who were recently in Guyana with the ACP regional conference were made very aware of those countries which have too much water because of climate change. Mr Musacchio was talking about the climate change impact on water; how it can contaminate, how it can dry it up, lose the access, but here we have too much and we have to bear in mind what that does in terms of polluting water supplies and causing damage to crops and all the rest of it.

So we have, I believe, to add to this list for the water forum the issue of forestation/deforestation, because, unless we get that right, we will go on having floods as well as droughts.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, nobody can underestimate the importance of water and the need to manage our water sources well. However, as I said in my introductory remarks, we also need to assist the poorer parts of the world in gaining access to clean drinking water. The Commission will continue to assist these countries.

Water is a primary human need, as was recognised and reaffirmed during the Fourth Water Forum in Mexico in 2006. Of course, as I said before, the EU will be represented and will put forward a strong case on all the points I have made at the forthcoming Forum in Istanbul.

Mr Bowis referred to another very important question – and I agree with him – namely that, because of climate change, we see other parts of the world being flooded with water. We really have to take action about that. As he said very clearly, forestation is one of the solutions to the problem.

President. – I have received one motion for a resolution⁽³⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 12 March 2009.

17. Court of Auditors Special Report No 10/2008 on ‘EC Development Assistance to Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa’ (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission on Court of Auditors Special Report No 10/2008 on EC Development Assistance to Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa by Mr Borrell Fontelles, on behalf of the Committee on Development (O-0030/2009 – B6-0016/2009).

Anne Van Lancker, author. – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Africa is the only continent that has not made any progress to speak of when it comes to meeting the Millennium Goals, particularly in the area of health, that is, in mother and infant mortality, the fight against HIV/AIDS, TBC and malaria. This is wholly attributable to their weak healthcare systems and the human resources crisis that is sweeping that sector. It is therefore abundantly clear that investing in health systems is essential in the fight against poverty.

This is, moreover, also the Commission’s view, but according to the report by the Court of Auditors, even though the Commission has claimed this for years, it has done precious little in the way of making any practical changes. The Commission is making efforts, mainly via vertical funds in the fight against AIDS, and this may well be necessary in our view, but this should not be at the expense of the overall package of investments in basic healthcare.

Commissioner, the budget for basic healthcare has not increased even proportionately since 2000 in the framework of the whole package of official development aid. There is therefore enough reason for this

⁽³⁾ See Minutes.

Parliament, on the basis of the Court of Auditors' report, to ask the Commission a few questions and make a few recommendations. I would like to make four points.

Firstly, the budget for healthcare must be increased. Clearly, a joint initiative is what is needed here from the EU along with its partner countries. The developing countries have committed to investing 15% of their budgets in the framework of the Abuja Declaration. This cannot possibly be done, though, Commissioner, if the Commission and Europe are only prepared to spend 5.5% of the European Development Fund (EDF) on this. I should therefore like to find out from you in what way the Commission would like to ensure that in the framework of the 10th EDF, the investments in health will be increased.

Secondly, better and efficient use should be made of budgetary support. Even though this is one of the Commission's showpieces, it receives low scores in the Court of Auditors' report. Nonetheless, budgetary support very much has the potential of meeting the shortcomings in southern healthcare systems. Whilst sectoral budgetary support can really target health systems, it is hardly used in sub-Saharan Africa.

General budgetary support can also prove helpful, provided the Commission can commit, and kindle enthusiasm in, the partners to select healthcare as a central sector, and we would urge the Commission to do this. My question to the Commission is: in what way will you ensure that much better and much more targeted action is taken both via sectoral support and general budgetary support?

Millennium Development Goals (MDG) contracts are one of the Commission's promising instruments. I am 100% behind them, but in all honesty, they are somewhat too insubstantial and too short-sighted because they are only meant for the good students, and so alternatives are very much needed for the others.

Thirdly, expertise must be enhanced. According to the report, the Commission has too little expertise to put its policy proposals in the healthcare sector into practice. This is why we would ask the Commission to guarantee this expertise by drafting in more health experts and also by working more effectively with the WHO and the Member States.

Fourthly, the healthcare sector must be better coordinated. Commissioner, it is absolutely vital for the European Code of Conduct on Division of Labour to be put into practice, and that the investments in, and programmes on, healthcare between the different EU countries are better coordinated. In addition, we must ensure that the so-called orphans among the needy countries can also guarantee aid in the area of health.

I should like to finish off with a word of thanks to Mr Staes who, on behalf of the Committee on Budgetary Control, supports the concern expressed by the Committee on Development, and has asked the Commission to clarify its plans with a view to the discharge procedure, and preferably before the end of 2009.

It is clear, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, that this Parliament urges the Commission finally to translate its policy priorities into reality with more conviction and with better instruments. This is more than necessary if we want to be in with a chance of achieving the Millennium Goals by 2015, because, Commissioner, basic healthcare deserves sustainable investments in the long term.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, the Commission really welcomes the European Court of Auditors' special report on EC support to health services in Africa. The debate on this oral question gives us an opportunity to discuss our health support to Africa with you, the European Parliament.

I am not going to repeat here the formal reaction the Commission has already made regarding the Court of Auditors' special report, which has already been published on the Internet.

Unfortunately, this report has not received wide coverage in the press and, when it was mentioned, things were sometimes oversimplified by saying that 'Europe has not kept its promises in Africa'. Let me therefore just clarify a few essential points before we enter into the debate.

The Commission remains fully committed to supporting the Millennium Development Goals, the health-related Goals 4, 5 and 6 being an integral part of these goals: reduction of child mortality by two thirds, reduction of maternal mortality by three quarters, and halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS. This is what our development cooperation stands for, but our commitment must not be measured by budgetary allocations to the health sector alone.

Doubtless, child mortality will be reduced by effective health service interventions, vaccinations in particular. Therefore, we monitor vaccination coverage not only in our health programmes but also in many of our

general budget support operations. However, child mortality also depends on other factors such as nutrition, housing, access to safe water, sanitation and education. Therefore our contribution can, and will, frequently be outside the healthcare sector itself.

When deciding on sectoral allocations and modalities of our development assistance, we agreed in Paris and Accra to increasingly respect basic principles of aid effectiveness. Here are just two examples. The first is leadership by partner governments. This means, after an in-depth discussion with the partner country, accepting the sectors proposed for support. It might not be the health sector but education or water and sanitation.

Second: alignment on national systems. This means channelling our aid, preferably as budget support (provided that the basic criteria are fulfilled). If the country has a sufficiently well formulated poverty strategy, our support may preferably be channelled as general budget support.

Although this support will not then be earmarked as health sector support, it is linked to targets for health, such as vaccination coverage rates or proportions of births assisted by skilled health personnel. Such targets are usually part of the poverty strategy and are monitored, and budget support disbursement is often linked to progress on them.

In addition to the global commitments on aid effectiveness made in Accra and Paris, we, the European Union, have collectively agreed on a code of conduct that foresees, for example, a reduction in the number of sectors in which each and every donor is active, in order to reduce the administrative and managerial burden on our partner countries through the multiplicity of donors. This is the meaning of the division of labour approach that EU Member States and the European Commission have agreed upon. We know that it will not always be easy to agree on this at the country level, particularly as health scores high in public opinion, and all donors and donor countries want to be present and to be seen. We will, at times, have to resist such a tendency and leave it to the other donors to do the job.

I therefore hope that our debate today will contribute to further clarifying these issues and to helping ensure that Europe fulfils its promises to Africa.

John Bowis, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam President, I thank the Commissioner for that response. I am sure you are right, Commissioner, that figures can mean many things and we need to look very carefully at them. But of course, today we are looking at the Court of Auditors, so we have to look at the figures. I sometimes wish we would look at people rather than figures, but we agree ‘no wealth without health’. That is not just a slogan but a reality in so many low-income countries.

We agree that the Court of Auditors says only 5.5% of EDF funding is going to health, whereas the European Union’s policy – and Parliament’s policy – is that 35% should be spent on health and education. There is a wrong figure there, and it may well not be as bad as that figure suggests. Nevertheless, it shows we have got to do a lot better, and that involves cooperation – if I can use that term – with the 15% pledge enshrined in the Abuja Declaration by the countries themselves.

However, Commissioner, I want to come back to the people. Go to Mali and see the diabetes out of control and look at the cost to families: over 30% of their family income spent on insulin, if they have to buy it – and they do have to buy it. Go to Chad and ask about the mental health services, and they will tell you that they used to have them before the civil war. Go anywhere in Africa and see the inhumane treatment of people with epilepsy, whereas for a few cents, we could make most of them seizure-free. Go anywhere in Africa and see the AIDS orphans and see and meet the grandparents trying to raise the grandchildren because the parents are dead.

The statistics are there. We know that in the Americas, 14% of the world’s population has 10% of the global burden of disease and 42% of the health workers. Sub-Saharan Africa has 11% of the world’s population, 25% of the global burden of disease and 3% of the health workers. It reflects the debate that we had earlier. But we have to look at those things because you cannot have health without health services, without health workers and without health education.

We also have to look at some of the projects that we are embarking on. It is not just TB, AIDS and malaria, but all the other diseases. It is the neglected diseases, for which the Commission stands proud with its cooperation with the pharmaceutical companies on that initiative to bring help to people in need of those medicines. We have to look at the causes of ill health, and the debates this evening have centred round those.

Only if we pull all these things together will the statistics add up – and that means the people will add up. What we do better will help people to be better, and then their economies could be better too.

Bart Staes, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (NL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the report of the Court of Auditors will not be officially presented in the Committee on Budgetary Control until next week. I should therefore like to congratulate the Committee on Development and also Mrs Van Lancker, who has made sure that this debate is being held here today and that tomorrow, we will be adopting a resolution which gives a detailed account of what has gone wrong.

We should pay close attention to Mrs Van Lancker's long speech and the recommendations she has made in it. Commissioner, we should pay close attention to Mr Bowis's speech, who managed to list the shortcomings very expertly.

Anyone who reads the Court of Auditors' report cannot simply skate over the issue. The figures are there for everyone to see, and Mrs Van Lancker was right to point out that the Millennium Goals for this sector will be achieved with great difficulty, if at all. Studying the figures which the Court of Auditors quotes for each country will bring you back down to earth with a bump.

With regard to AIDS prevalence, 34% of the population is affected in Swaziland, 23% in Lesotho and 14% in Malawi. Child mortality in Swaziland was 78/1000 in 1997, compared to 86/1000 now. In Lesotho, life expectancy in the mid-90s was 60, now only 41. In Kenya, more than 1 in 10 children die before the age of five. The recommendation, the analysis of the Court of Auditors about the efficiency of EU policy has, in the last few years, been painfully disquieting.

I therefore hope, Commissioner, that the Commission will indeed succeed in answering the questions by 10 April, which I, as rapporteur of the Committee on Budgetary Control, managed to have included in this resolution, so that we can incorporate the answers in the discharge procedure that is due at the end of April.

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, anyone visiting sub-Saharan Africa can easily see, in most countries, the enormous weakness in their health systems and the extremely negative impact that this weakness has on the lives and health of the people who should be helped by these services.

The figures regularly published at international level constantly confirm this. In this respect, the idea that simple and practical gestures, which are not particularly elaborate or even particularly expensive, might be sufficient to save many lives is extremely disturbing. European financial support can be crucial in this respect and we must always keep in mind that cooperation in the area of health is truly strategic and directly involves not just one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) but many of them. The Court of Auditors found, and I quote, that 'EC funding to the health sector has not increased since 2000 as a proportion of its total development assistance despite the Commission's MDG commitments and the health crisis in sub-Saharan Africa'. End of quotation. It also recognised, and again I quote, that: 'The Commission contributed significant funding to help launch the Global Fund [to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria] but has not given the same attention to strengthening health systems although this was intended to be its priority'. End of quotation.

According to the Court, this will have happened, and again I quote, because 'the Commission has had insufficient health expertise to ensure the most effective use of health funding'. End of quotation.

The Court of Auditors therefore directly presents the European Commission with a huge challenge, which I endorse. For our part, I want to reiterate this challenge, based on the objectivity of this data and this assessment. Health services already form part, but must increasingly form part, of our development assistance priorities, and they therefore merit an increase in funding. Optimising how aid is given, bearing in mind the apparently opposing needs of coordination of management and proximity to the beneficiary populations, will be to provide a service that can save many lives.

The European Commission cannot fail to respond positively to this challenge and I urge it to do so. Just now, Mr Bowis made a touching speech in which he managed to put faces, human faces, to the dry coldness of these numbers from the Court of Auditors. The challenge for us, Commissioner, is to ensure that our cooperation can put a look of happiness and hope on these same faces. That is why, Commissioner, it is vital that we change the numbers in our health cooperation.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, I did not really want to speak on this report, but just to add a point that is particularly close to my heart and which I have raised on several occasions at the ACP meetings. It is the issue of health conditions for the Tuareg people in Niger. In this context,

Commissioner, I should really like to raise the problem of European companies that exploit natural resources in African countries and, in particular, the French company, Areva, which is going to exploit uranium in Niger, without giving any information to the local communities, with the result that the people living there are using, for example, radioactive materials or scrap metal for cooking utensils.

Today, the authorities in Niger are not allowing serious studies to be carried out on the situation regarding radioactivity among these people, but we know that they are in an alarming situation.

We had asked, during one ACP meeting, for an epidemiological study to be carried out on these people. I am putting this request again today to the Commission.

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, not only have I listened carefully to what has been said tonight, and not only have I paid attention to what was said in the report by the Court of Auditors, but also, as I said before, I have just come back from a visit to Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia and have seen with my own eyes what the needs of these countries are in the field of health. They have needs in terms of infrastructure, needs in terms of the trained health providers we have already talked about, and needs in terms of medication.

Those needs are immense, and I cannot but agree with you that we have to intensify our efforts in offering our help, in the field of health, in the poor countries of Africa.

I can assure you that I will convey your comments to my colleague, Louis Michel, and I am sure he, too, will consider all your suggestions and comments with great attention, just as I have done.

President. – I have received one motion for a resolution⁽⁴⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

18. Implementation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) (debate)

President. – The next item is the oral question to the Commission by Mrs Berès, on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, on the implementation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) (O-0018/2009).

Pervenche Berès, *author*. – (FR) Mr President, I am speaking on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. Commissioner, the European Parliament, under the authority of our rapporteur, Mr Gauzès, has been very committed to ensuring that the legislative measures necessary for implementing the SEPA – Single Euro Payments Area – project come into existence.

When we drew up the accompanying legislation, the Directive on Payment Services, we asked ourselves some questions. We now realise that these questions were probably justified.

Now that this project is to be launched, we have some concerns, because we do not have the impression that the level of mobilisation, which it seems to me has nothing to do with the challenges of the crisis, has not quite materialised as it should have done.

The fact is, this project, which has received a great deal of support from those in the sector and from the legislator but which, above all, must provide a modern payment tool that is suited to the circumstances of our single currency, the euro, is in danger of not achieving the critical mass that it should have in order to be fully effective.

We are particularly concerned that the launch of the SEPA Direct Debit scheme, which is undoubtedly one of the most original aspects of this project, is running into some difficulties.

⁽⁴⁾ See Minutes.

We feel that, in view of the Commission's responsibility, there are two questions to be asked. Firstly, how does the Commission intend to promote and support migration to the SEPA payment instruments? A timescale had been fixed, and it is obvious that it does not take all the practicalities into account. Secondly, is the Commission of the opinion that the migration of a critical mass of transactions to the SEPA instruments should have been achieved by 2010, and, if not, what should be done to achieve this?

When we adopted this legislation, we did not decide on a clear and binding end date for migration to the SEPA instruments. We think it is undoubtedly time to do so. We understand that some questions still remain about the compatibility of national systems with the SEPA system and about what is meant by definitive migration, but we feel that it is the Commission's responsibility to support the industry in finding solutions to the questions they still have.

Next, there is the matter of interchange fees, which clearly has been ignored or neglected, when, for many players, it is absolutely central to the success of the SEPA project. From this point of view, it sometimes seems that, among the various competent bodies, be they in the professional banking sector, the Internal Market and Services Directorate-General or the Directorate-General for Competition, we are passing the buck somewhat.

Perhaps it is part of the legislator's responsibility to talk with these players and to demand some sense of responsibility from them. We feel that, at this stage, we cannot call a consistent piece of legislation into question without supporting the market operators in their efforts to develop an alternative system. This is precisely the difficulty we have with this issue of interchange fees.

The Directorate-General for Competition has indicated, in some cases, that it considers this piece of legislation to be contrary to the competition rules, but then it believes that it is up to the industry to find an alternative solution. The fact is, the alternative solutions that exist at Member State level have not been tested by the Directorate-General for Competition. Therefore, there is no way of knowing whether the Directorate-General for Competition could support them, or whether some of the solutions are appropriate for the problems we face.

For example, imagine that financing an interchange system relied on penalties imposed under the legislation, that is to say, on errors committed. In practice, this would very often mean making the most vulnerable people pay, and that does not seem to me to be reasonable or socially just.

I therefore call on the Commission to take action on two important points: to fix an end date for migration and to help develop an alternative system or a system that is acceptable from the point of view of the rules of the Treaty on interchange.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first of all may I convey the regrets of Commissioner McCreevy for not being able to attend.

Well, this is indeed a long question but I believe both the question and the draft resolution on SEPA implementation correctly identify the key issues we need to resolve to make a success of SEPA.

The first question asks how the Commission intends to promote and foster migration to SEPA instruments.

SEPA is primarily a market-driven project, but given the substantial benefits to the wider economy, the Commission has sought to encourage SEPA migration, for example by acting as a catalyst to raise the political profile of SEPA through our SEPA Progress Report and by encouraging early migration by public authorities. And, also, by striving itself to be an early adopter of SEPA. And finally, as announced in last week's Commission proposal 'Driving European Recovery', by coming forward with proposals to ensure that the full benefits of SEPA are realised.

The second question asks if a critical mass of payments will have migrated by the end of 2010. Clearly we favour rapid migration to keep extra costs during migration to a minimum. Although the SEPA Credit Transfer (SCT) has been successfully launched, less than 2% of payments have migrated. Furthermore, the Sepa Direct Debit will only be launched later this year. So the current pace of migration is too slow to attain critical mass migration by 2010.

The third question was on the necessity of a clear and binding end date. We see the strong merits of fixing an end date and, of course, 2012 does not seem unreasonable. However, for many Member States this remains a very sensitive question. We therefore favour establishing a clear process to examine this question, by

collecting information on the impact of an end date on different stakeholders and launching a meaningful debate with them.

This could pave the way for some political endorsement and, if needed, a possible legislative proposal, for example, at the end of the year.

Your fourth question asks how to enhance legal certainty for the SEPA Direct Debit in relation to the MIF and existing mandates.

We need a temporary solution to the business model problem to provide legal clarity and get the SEPA Direct Debit successfully launched. That is why the Commission fully supports the efforts of Parliament and the Council to find a temporary solution within the context of the revision of the Regulation on cross-border payments.

The Commission also supports the continued legal validity of existing national direct debit mandates under SEPA migration. However, this is a legal matter for national authorities to solve, for example, by using the opportunity provided by the Payment Services Directive's implementation.

The fifth question related to how the Commission is tackling the MIF issue for card payments.

This work is progressing primarily through the Commission's assessment under the competition rules of the two major international card schemes, namely MasterCard and Visa.

On 19 December 2007, the Commission decided that the MasterCard MIFs for cross-border card payments with MasterCard and Maestro branded consumer credit and debit cards were not compatible with the competition rules. MasterCard is appealing the Commission's decision.

In March 2008, the Commission opened proceedings to establish whether Visa Europe's MIF constitutes an infringement of Article 81. Discussions with Visa are ongoing as well.

The Commission seeks to maintain a level playing field for MasterCard and Visa Europe as well as for the other payment card schemes which might emerge in the future.

Your penultimate question asks if the Commission should propose a concrete solution to the MIF issue. In a market economy, it is incumbent upon industry to propose an appropriate business model. In relation to cards, as I have said, discussions are ongoing with Mastercard and Visa. In relation to SEPA direct debit, the Commission is willing to assist industry by providing urgent guidance within the framework of a sustained dialogue with the banking industry and on the basis of contributions by the relevant market actors. This guidance should be provided by November 2009 at the latest.

And your final question asks what specific measures the Commission intends to propose to make sure that SEPA migration does not lead to a more expensive payment system.

In the Commission's opinion, this should not happen. Firstly, SEPA should foster competition and increase operational efficiency through economies of scale – both producing downward price pressure.

Secondly, SEPA should also increase transparency, which will limit cross-subsidisation and hidden pricing, although optically, some users may perceive the switch from high hidden pricing to low visible pricing as a price increase. Here, clear communication by banks will be important.

Third, the Commission is carefully monitoring the impact of SEPA on customers by launching studies.

Finally, we agree that there is concern that efficient national debit card schemes may be replaced by more expensive alternatives. However, there are initiatives that could develop into a new pan-European debit card scheme and an overall backstop is provided by the existing powers of EU and national competition authorities.

Therefore, in conclusion, SEPA should result in a more efficient payment system and adequate safeguards under EU and national competition policy exist.

I therefore very much welcome this Resolution and Parliament's strong support for SEPA.

Jean-Paul Gauzès, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, much has just been said about what has become of this Payment Services Directive for which I was Parliament's rapporteur and which was adopted at first reading in 2007.

The purpose of this directive was, among other things, to give the various banking institutions, grouped within the EPC, the legal instruments necessary for the implementation of SEPA. A European regulation has therefore been adopted for bank cards, credit transfers and direct debits.

SEPA is an integrated market for payment services in euros where there will be no difference between cross-border payments and national payments. This situation will have benefits both for the banking sector and for consumers.

As you said, the Commission has committed itself to ensuring that migration to the SEPA instruments does not result in a more expensive payment system for the citizens of the European Union.

Since the adoption of this report, migration to SEPA has progressed very slowly, much too slowly. On 1 October 2008, only 1.7% of transactions were made by way of the SEPA Credit Transfer format.

That is why, today, we are approving the European Parliament resolution calling on the Commission to fix an end date for migration to SEPA products. This date must not be later than 31 December 2012, after which date all payments in euros should be made using the SEPA standards.

Before this migration can take effect, however, the sensitive problem, the sensitive issue of multilateral interchange fees, needs to be resolved. These fees should not be abolished. Payment services are a commercial activity. It is legitimate to cover costs and keep a profit margin for participants.

On the other hand, opacity or arbitrariness should be avoided. It is therefore appropriate for the Commission to lay down guidelines with respect to the application of these interchange fees.

In order to have more legal certainty, these guidelines must be known before the SEPA system for direct debits is launched. Without this legal certainty, banks in many countries might not launch the direct debit system, and this could bring implementation of SEPA to a halt.

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament have tabled very similar amendments along these lines for tomorrow's vote. Obviously, we hope that they will be taken into consideration.

Margarita Starkevičiūtė (ALDE). – (LT) At this difficult time, it is very important to find possible sources of economic growth. The development of our European financial market is exactly such a source of possible growth for the European economy. In this instance, we are talking about the payment market, and it is regrettable that the decisions we have taken are being implemented rather slowly. Technical possibilities of banks are usually cited as the main reason, as these are mostly technical solutions, but I would like to say that technical modernisation of banks is in the interest of the banking sector and the banks themselves and, in this way, they can modernise their market, their payment systems and increase their profits. Therefore, it is very important that Member States implement the Single Euro Payments Area implementation plan with more determination.

Paul Rübzig (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we know that the Single Euro Payments Area represents a genuine challenge to small and medium-sized enterprises. They have recently been working very intensively with the credit card system and the prices and costs which result from these systems differ greatly. I believe that the required degree of transparency is not present here.

It is precisely during a crisis that we need commensurate support for business. It must be possible to improve the creditworthiness of companies by reducing costs, because then, of course, they can get access to credit again. I think that the SEPA would be a good instrument here. It should be implemented as quickly as possible in order to achieve a situation where not only can small and medium-sized enterprises work cheaply and efficiently, but where this also applies to transactions between small and large businesses.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would like to thank the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and its Chair, Mrs Berès, for this debate. The Commission welcomes Parliament's support for SEPA, which is not only a self-regulatory initiative, but also a major public policy initiative reinforcing economic and monetary union as well as the Lisbon agenda. Parliament and the Commission clearly share the same vision and the same goal for SEPA.

Let me, however, recall three important points. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, the Commission has been very active in helping to drive forward the SEPA migration process, in particular, by putting pressure on public authorities to be early adopters. We will relentlessly continue our efforts as a SEPA catalyst.

Secondly, although we share Parliament's interest for an end date for SEPA, we do not believe that the time is right to carve an end date in stone. We have put a process in motion and are convinced that a lot of ground work is needed before such a commitment can be envisaged.

Thirdly, I can confirm that the Commission will provide guidance on the compatibility of multilateral, interbank remuneration with competition rules. We know there is little time left before the entry into force of the SEPA direct debit, and that our guidance should therefore be available before November 2009. However, let me insist on one point: that guidance can only be provided subject to the industry supplying us first with concrete ideas for possible business models.

President. – I have received one motion for a resolution⁽⁵⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, 12 March 2009.

19. Sri Lanka (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the motion for a resolution tabled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka (B6-0140/2009).

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like first of all to thank the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs for agreeing to accept the procedure laid down in Article 91 and to put this emergency resolution on last Monday's agenda, since, at our last plenary here, in Strasbourg, we already had an emergency resolution on this issue of Sri Lanka. I would also like to thank Parliament for having agreed to this debate taking place this evening, and I thank you, Commissioner, for coming to this debate, as I know the time is difficult for you.

We wanted this resolution because we have to send a strong political signal to the government and the Tamil representatives in Sri Lanka, because the situation is getting worse every day. We have first hand accounts from Tamil families and people who are in Europe and who are always sending us messages and accounts of what is happening to them and what is happening to their families trapped in the conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan army. These people are enduring really terrible suffering.

We do not know how many people are affected, but we estimate that between 150 and 200 000 people need to be evacuated. What is meant by 'evacuated', though? The NGOs are asking us to have them evacuated by sea, but, there again, I have to ask: to go where? Where are these people going to go?

This afternoon, I met a little girl who was born in a Sri Lankan refugee camp and who is now in Europe. If it is that these people have to leave their country to go and live in refugee camps, then that is not the solution, either.

Therefore, we are asking in this resolution for there to be an actual ceasefire. Of course, there will be debate with the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats about an immediate or temporary ceasefire. We are really asking the authorities for an immediate ceasefire so that civilians can be removed from danger, because we know that there are people who have been killed. We have had another example of this today with these testimonies. We are asking, of course, in this resolution, for the Sri Lankan Government to cooperate with the NGOs and with countries that are willing to help to resolve this conflict. We are also asking if the European Union can help to deliver desperately needed food and medicines.

Finally, may I say on behalf of my group – since it is on the initiative of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance that we tabled this emergency resolution on Monday in the Committee on Foreign Affairs – that we are asking for this issue to be taken very seriously by some of our fellow Members, who have different interests in this country. I would remind you that, for a long time now, some of the political groups have been asking for the opportunity to speak about the situation in Sri Lanka and that, for internal reasons in some countries, we have not been able to debate this issue of the Tamils and their situation, which has deteriorated since the 1980s.

⁽⁵⁾ See Minutes.

Since you are here with us, Commissioner, maybe we can ask ourselves another question. The European Union appears to have the ability to help in resolving conflict. Perhaps the time has come for us to consider the possibility of setting up a conflict resolution unit within the European Union.

We can see in the Caucasus, we can see everywhere else in the world that the European Union is taken seriously for the proposals that it issues. In resolving conflict today, we must no longer be just a supportive participant, but an actual promoter of conflict resolution. If, today, we can start to lay the foundations to resolve this conflict with a strong European Union presence and a strong message to the authorities, I believe that we will have also increased our stature in terms of political union.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, as one of the Tokyo Co-Chairs of the Sri Lanka peace process, the European Commission and I personally have been following the developments in Sri Lanka very closely. We are deeply concerned about the current situation and the tragic humanitarian consequences of the conflict, as expressed in the GAERC Council conclusions of 23 February and the Co-Chairs' statement, issued locally on 3 February.

We are particularly preoccupied about the plight of thousands of internally displaced persons – you are right – trapped by fighting in Northern Sri Lanka. We are no longer facing a crisis but what I think is already a humanitarian catastrophe. This was confirmed to us by a wide range of independent sources, including the UN and the ICRC. The Government's recent announcement about opening two evacuation roads at the north and at the south of the safe zone is a positive step but we want to know how this will work in practice.

We have called on the parties – the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan authorities – to protect the civilian population as required under international humanitarian law and to allow the safe and voluntary movement of people away from the combat zone. Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army are responsible for the dramatic increase in civilian casualties during the past months. There is an immediate and urgent need to act to save lives in Sri Lanka, as was also confirmed by the UN Under-Secretary, Sir John Holmes, who drew attention to the high casualty rate, and also the ICRC.

The Commission is convinced that the outcome of this crisis will have lasting consequences for peace, for reconciliation and for the unity of Sri Lanka and, in this context, strongly supports the call issued by Sir John Holmes to the Government of Sri Lanka to interrupt hostilities to allow time for the civilian population to get out safely and to the LTTE to let the civilians go and agree on a peaceful end to the fighting.

The Co-Chairs have also appealed to the LTTE to lay down their arms but unfortunately, this call has been rejected, even ignored. We feel that the Government of Sri Lanka has an obligation to protect all its own citizens and agree to a humanitarian ceasefire – this was also said in the Council conclusions last time – to allow sick and wounded people to leave Vanni and to arrange for food and medicine to be let in. This is also what India suggested last weekend.

We continue to be alarmed about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, against the background of reports of extrajudicial killings, abductions and serious intimidation of the media. It is very important that the Government follows up the most prominent high-profile cases. There cannot be any impunity for such crimes.

At the end of the day the European Commission continues to be convinced, as I myself would say, that there is no military solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. An inclusive dialogue is required, leading to a political settlement. Lasting peace and reconciliation can only be achieved by addressing the concerns which led to the insurgency in the first place and by providing adequate space for all the communities. As a Co-Chair, I have always said there can only be a political solution by means of some sort of devolution package, which has been on the table, has been taken off the table, and now has to come back on the table.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam Commissioner, Sri Lanka's brutal civil conflict is finally nearing its end. Of course, it is too early to say whether this will mean the end of terrorist activity by the Tamil Tigers.

We certainly should not support a permanent ceasefire at this stage in case it allows the Tigers to regroup. In my view, their only option now is to lay down their arms or be defeated militarily with more casualties. A long-term ceasefire would be a disaster because – as a suicide attack in Sri Lanka earlier this week demonstrates – the LTTE is ruthless, bloodthirsty and rightly identified as a terrorist organisation by the European Union and the United States.

We should be resolute in our support for President Rajapaksa in his efforts to end an insurgency that has only brought untold human misery to Sri Lanka and severely retarded economic development on that beautiful island. However, thousands of innocent civilian IDPs still remained trapped on a narrow coastal strip. These civilians must be allowed to leave so that the army can conclude its offensive. It is reprehensible, but entirely to be expected of the Tigers, that they are exploiting these civilians as human shields. The Tigers have been deaf to appeals from the international community to surrender and establish a temporary humanitarian corridor.

Nevertheless, allowing the UN and other organisations to arrange safe passage from the conflict zone for these civilians is essential to avoid further bloodbaths. Sri Lanka appreciates its own responsibility in this regard and wants to avoid civilian casualties but, understandably, the army's patience is limited and fears that the Tigers will seek to escape by a sea evacuation procedure, mixing in with the civilians.

Therefore, we on this side of the House endorse the establishment of a humanitarian corridor and a temporary and immediate ceasefire or cessation of hostilities, but we also want to see the comprehensive defeat of the LTTE and a peaceful, just and multi-ethnic Sri Lanka established in its place, where there is maximum autonomy to the Tamil majority areas and an equitable sharing of resources and power within a unitary Sri Lankan state.

Robert Evans, on behalf of the PSE Group. – Mr President, I very much welcome this debate in the presence of the Commissioner, whom I thank very much for her serious, her strong and her profound statement. It is clearly a very important subject, although it is regrettable that we are discussing it at 11 o'clock at night with so few people here. But the attendance does not, I think, reflect the interest in this topic, nor the seriousness with which many Members view it. We are, to use the Commissioner's words, deeply concerned about the situation. Tonight's debate recognises also that the situation has moved on and, as Mrs Isler Béguin said at the beginning, that we need to send a strong signal about the deteriorating situation that is worsening day by day.

I support the original resolution tabled, with the exception of the one word 'temporary'. I deplore the language that Mr Tannock has just used, when he said that a long-term ceasefire would be a disaster. Surely – I appeal to you – we are not interested in just a temporary ceasefire. In every case of conflict around the world, this Parliament, composed of compassionate people, has argued for a permanent ceasefire that can pave the way for diplomatic rebuilding, so that dialogue can begin – and, yes – so that we can get that peaceful, just and multi-ethnic society that Mr Tannock spoke about and with which I agree.

So I applaud the Greens for their first amendment, Amendment 1, and I am sure that all decent people here, concerned about the civilians in Sri Lanka, will too. A temporary ceasefire by its very nature implies a return to war later on, which nobody wants. A return to war will mean more deaths, more suffering, more humanitarian tragedy and I cannot believe that anybody on either side of the House really wants that.

Likewise, Amendment 2: I support this amendment too because it condemns all acts of violence by whoever is perpetrating them, on whatever side of the conflict. We cannot condone any violence, including the recent suicide attack which has been referred to.

Then I turn my attention to Amendments 3, 4 and 5. I would like to read a short piece that I received from a Sri Lankan Member of Parliament in the Jaffna district, Mr Selvarajah Kajendren, dated 10 March. He says 'I wish to bring to your urgent attention the civilian deaths in Sri Lanka. The Army fired artillery shells fitted with cluster munitions from 2 a.m. till 10 a.m. on Tuesday 10 March 2009' – this week. 'The Sri Lankan Government forces indiscriminately attacked all parts of the 'safe zone' using every kind of lethal shells, some of them banned in many countries. In this indiscriminate cluster shelling, more than 130 civilians were killed, including children, and more than 200 were severely injured.'

I doubt that anyone would suggest that this is fabricated. More, I would suggest that we all want to do everything we can to help bring an end to that sort of violence. He also refers to his colleague, Mr S. Kanakarathnam, who is living right in the middle of the 'safe zone'. He says that from 1 January to 6 March this year, 2 544 civilians have been killed in these 'safe zones' by bombing campaigns and well over 5 828 civilians have been gravely injured. Yet the Sri Lankan army, he says, have been bombing by air and artillery fire, killing on average 30 to 40 civilians on a daily basis.

I do not believe that he would be fabricating. From what the Commissioner has said, from all the evidence given by all the NGOs that have got anywhere near there, that seems to be reflective of what is happening.

Amendment 6: I refer here to the report by Sir John Holmes, which was sent to me by His Excellency, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka, in Brussels. In the report, he says there is serious overcrowding in some of the transit sites. His words are reflected in my amendment and it is right that we should be concerned about these camps. I have some pictures of the camps. Anybody is welcome to look at these pictures that have been sent to me. Again, I suggest they are genuine and not fabricated. I know that the Commissioner's office in Colombo is following this very closely and has close contacts within the real danger zone.

Amendments 7 and 8 strengthen the original reference to the war zone so that civilian needs can be fully attended to. We ask for unhindered access not only to the combat zone but also to the refugee camps so that humanitarian agencies, which everybody in this House supports, are granted full access. Everybody round the Chamber would support the work of the humanitarian organisations.

Finally, Amendment 9 suggests we send this resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations because I believe that this is an international humanitarian crisis, as reflected in the title, and that we should do everything we can. That is why I thank the Greens for putting this down and I ask all colleagues to support the amendments tabled by all political groups.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, I wish to thank Mrs Ferrero-Waldner for her speech and for her response to the call from the NGOs and the people who are trapped.

We are afraid of finding ourselves in a somewhat similar situation to Burma after the tsunami in 2006, where the junta prevented access to humanitarian aid. Now, therefore, we must do everything possible so that humanitarian aid and our aid reaches the people who need it.

I should also like, however, to speak to my fellow Members from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, because I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that we must appeal to wisdom. Indeed, we submitted this proposal for an emergency resolution in order to allow Parliament to express an opinion and adopt a position tomorrow.

What I would not want, under any circumstances, is for one side or the other not to vote for this resolution because of differences of opinion about an immediate ceasefire or a temporary ceasefire, which we understand because the debate has already taken place. I therefore genuinely call upon you, please, to act wisely.

On the other hand, I should like to say, particularly to Mr Tannock, that, to repeat the words of Mrs Ferrero-Waldner: armed conflict never solved any problem. We know that. War never resolves anything.

In my opinion, asking for a temporary ceasefire is irresponsible with regard to the people concerned. That would mean, in fact, putting them back into battle at some future time – and what a future that would be – once the people had been evacuated. Can we allow ourselves to leave people to be evacuated? Tamil people are people who own land. Therefore, they want to return to their land. They are Sri Lankan.

I therefore believe that we have to pay close attention to this matter, but I am prepared to make concessions and to withdraw amendments provided that, together, we can reach a common position so as to send out this strong political signal to the entire world.

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE). – Mr President, we should be under no illusions about the terrible impact of war on innocent civilians and our moral duty to do all that we can to reduce their vulnerability and to help in the provision of humanitarian assistance. That is why Parliament passed its urgent resolution on Sri Lanka less than three weeks ago.

For decades now, Sri Lanka has been afflicted by a terrorist campaign conducted by the internationally proscribed LTTE. There is no equivalence between terrorists and the legitimate forces of a democratic government. Let us remember that it was the LTTE that perfected suicide bombing as a tactic, that it pioneered the use of women in suicide attacks, and that it makes undisguised use of child soldiers and of human shields. Over the last 26 years, it has systematically carried out thousands of deliberate murders across Sri Lanka and, just two days ago, 14 people were murdered in a suicide attack during an Islamic festival in the Matara district.

The LTTE is now in a desperate end game and, typically in such situations, is turning to international apologists to get it off the hook. A tiny minority of Members of this House were unhappy with the resolution passed by the majority in this Parliament and, disgracefully and improperly, they wanted to focus condemnation on the Sri Lankan Government. We cannot support amendments based on unattributable – and often

nonsensical – allegations, as we have heard from Mr Evans, or selective quotation from one NGO report. We have no good reason to dispute the Government's firm assertion that its troops have not fired on no-fire zones and will not do so.

Six days ago, the Secretary-General of the United Nations called on the LTTE to remove its weapons and fighters from areas of civilian concentration and to cooperate in all humanitarian efforts calculated to relieve the suffering of civilians. The European Union has condemned the action of the LTTE in preventing civilians from leaving the conflict area.

The greatest service all in this House can do is call on the LTTE to lay down its arms and to release the civil population from its grip. Then, much-needed humanitarian aid can be delivered, people can begin to look forward to better lives and all Sri Lanka can get back on the path of democratic politics and to building a fair and more prosperous society for all its citizens, free from terrorist oppression.

Jo Leinen (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, I totally agree with you that we need a political solution, not a military solution in Sri Lanka. I have visited this country many times as a member of the South Asia delegation. I know how the people long for peace after 25 years of violence.

However, I must say that, in this sort of war, the LTTE should make a move and unfortunately, is not doing so. You too mentioned that and the Foreign Ministers again urgently called on 23 February for this organisation to lay down its arms and end the terror. Just imagine a Member State of the EU in which terror has reigned for 25 years. That there is a great deal of chaos and disorder there is easy to imagine. I support the Tamils' cause, but I reject the LTTE's methods equally decisively. For weeks, we have heard that in this small district, more than 100 000 people have simply been seized. Reuters reported just yesterday that, according to eye witness reports, people are being shot when they try to leave this zone. So we need to call on the LTTE and the forces behind the LTTE to end these practices. The game is up; they cannot carry on like this.

Obviously civilians in this war zone are exposed to barrage fire from both sides. We must also call on the government to respect international law and permit humanitarian actions. It is the fundamentalism on both sides that is demanding so many victims. I think we should prepare for post-war order. As you said, the 13th amendment in the Sri Lankan constitution must be implemented, which provides for decentralisation in the sense of regional administration by the people who live there and the EU can provide valuable help here. I am sure that you in the Commission and we in the EU are prepared to do so.

Paul Rübige (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, ladies and gentlemen, I think that what the Commissioner said, namely that a military solution is not possible, needs to be reported on the front pages in Sri Lanka. Namely that, in terms of the tensions in the country and the problems that have piled up here over the years, the government does, in fact, keep trying to make an offer. It founders quite simply on the communication strategy.

Of course, you also have to see that the strategic position of Sri Lanka also gives external factors room, setting external factors in motion that are very hard to control within the country alone. Care therefore also needs to be taken to ensure that the economic situation improves and that the infrastructure in these areas is improved, so that the necessary communication between the parties to the conflict is possible. Perhaps it would be possible to use one or other of the mediators here.

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL). – (NL) Mr President, what is happening in Sri Lanka now has been in the making for quite a few years. It is not simply a humanitarian problem, but mainly a serious political failure. After years of violent struggle for the separation of the North-East of the country, a previous administration of Norway offered mediation between the Sinhalese majority government and the rebel Tamil movement. The Norwegian negotiator who worked for a long time to reach peaceful solutions is now a minister in the new government himself. Unfortunately, though, this option for a peaceful solution has since been abandoned.

In the summer of 2006, the Sri Lankan Government ended the peace attempts and opted again to unilaterally impose a military solution. This government is now probably labouring under the illusion that it managed to achieve a major success, whereas in reality, a peaceful, harmonious co-existence of the two peoples as equal partners will be even more difficult in future. Without a compromise on a peaceful solution, the future looks gruesomely violent. We have to revert back to peace mediation without winners or losers.

Michael Gahler (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, thank you Commissioner for speaking so plainly. I think that our main focus now must be directed towards the fate of the civilian population and the only thing that can, in fact, apply here is what was said in the Council of Ministers on 23 February, namely that the EU calls

for an immediate ceasefire. I am against adding the word 'temporary', otherwise the humanitarian disaster which you referred to will continue.

I also think that, in this situation, where the people are trapped in this zone, we must oppose all acts of violence that prevent people from leaving the combat zone. In this situation, it does not matter to me if the violence is being perpetrated by the LTTE or by government troops. Our focus must be on the people themselves.

Perhaps I might make a comment to my honourable friends from the former colonial power who are preparing to leave our group. I hope that the impression which has imposed itself upon me, that there is also a certain domestic incentive to lash out so unilaterally at the LTTE alone, is false. I also hope that they do not have a specific segment of the electorate in mind.

Robert Evans (PSE). – Mr President, this is not a point of order. I was indicating to your colleague that I wanted to 'catch the eye' to speak, which I am allowed to do and which I thought I had done.

I want to thank Mr Meijer for his remarks. He also referred to the valiant work of Mr Erik Soldheim, from Norway, whom I met 10 days ago in Oslo.

I very much agree with Mr Gahler, who spoke a great deal of sense: it is the fate of the civilians that concerns us. I suggest that of all the amendments, the most important is Amendment 1, which calls for an immediate and total ceasefire, and which must be in the interests of all the people of Sri Lanka.

There is much evidence. It is not circumstantial. Some of it is from the office of the regional director of the health services of the Sri Lankan Government, which talks about a humanitarian catastrophe and the substandard conditions in which people are living. This is echoed by the European Commission, the ICRC, the UN, the International Crisis Group and Refugee Care Netherlands. The title of the debate this evening is the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka, and we have a duty to do everything we possibly can to prevent that, which I think we can, if we find the right way forward.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I strictly applied the Rules of Procedure. As I was able to give the floor to five speakers, and as only three actually spoke, I decided to also give the floor to Mr Evans.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would like to thank the honourable Members for what has been a very important debate, even if it was short and took place late in the evening.

Since the beginning of this Commission's term of office, as a Co-Chair, I have been very much preoccupied by Sri Lanka. There were moments when we had some hope – rather more at the beginning – but hope has now faded away. I wanted to take part in the Geneva Process, but it seems that was difficult for the Government of Sri Lanka. In any case, this process unfortunately broke down. I was also ready to go up to the north to start mediation, like my predecessor, Chris Patten. But the north was not ready – officially Mr Prabhakaran had measles or chicken pox. In any case, I am in complete agreement with Mr Gahler, who said – and this is also my own concern – that we should put people and humanitarian concerns first.

As is so often the case, we have been the largest humanitarian donors in Sri Lanka. In 2008-2009, we allocated EUR 19 million for humanitarian assistance, which was then channelled through partners like the ICRC, the United Nations and also some international non-governmental organisations. These organisations are ready to help the affected populations, but they have real problems – which they tell us about – in gaining access to the conflict area. Since September 2008, the ICRC has been the only agency allowed to operate in the LTTE controlled areas in Vanni. The World Food Programme has been allowed to send some food convoys, but this has only been sufficient for around 50% of needs. Since 2008, we have provided another EUR 7 million in humanitarian assistance to the two organisations. We have also been pushing consistently, in both Colombo and Brussels, for better access to these populations by humanitarian organisations.

Therefore, I can only say – together with the other Co-Chairs and also particularly with Norway – that we have used every opportunity to press the parties in conflict to implement the 2002 ceasefire agreement and to solve the conflict using peaceful means, but nothing has worked. Numerous calls for a return to negotiations have always been totally ignored and unfortunately, the military route has prevailed. The scope for intervention by the international community has narrowed more and more over the last three years, but not one of the Co-Chairs has abandoned the mission. We have all remained committed to contributing to a peaceful solution to the conflict, as can be seen from the last Co-Chairs' press statement released on 3 February, of which I am sure you will all be aware.

Therefore, what we must do now is again press for humanitarian access, get the humanitarian and civilian population out, and then try, when the time is right, to start to foster a political dialogue with the parties in conflict and try to persuade them that a political solution is the only way out. Otherwise, there will be a guerrilla war, which will not solve anything for this beautiful island. It was once a paradise and could become a paradise again.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, 12 March 2009.

20. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

21. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.35 p.m.)