

THURSDAY, 20 JANUARY 2011

IN THE CHAIR: MIGUEL ANGEL MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 09:00)

2. Documents received: see Minutes

3. Report on competition policy 2009 (debate)

President. – The first item is the report by Mr Eppink, on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary affairs, on the Report on Competition Policy 2009 (2010/2137(INI)) (A7-0374/2010).

Derk Jan Eppink, *rapporteur.* – Mr President, these days, competition is often regarded as a concept that makes life difficult. Some people prefer cosy arrangements and the hot tub of backstage agreements as protection against the harsh world of global competition. But, Commissioner, competition is not the spoiler but the lifesaver of the European economy. Europe is at a crossroads. Will it create a transfer economy, with low growth and high structural unemployment, or will it have a wealth-creating economy that stands the test of global competition?

A football team, Commissioner, that is not competitive loses game after game. An economy that is not competitive loses investment, jobs and finally, the basis of its social arrangements. Since European competition policy is the exclusive competence of the European Commission, you, Commissioner – or rather Commissioner Almunia, for whom you are standing in – play a decisive role.

This week, the United Nations published figures on foreign direct investment in 2010. The United States attracted 43% more foreign investment than in 2009. Foreign direct investment in Latin America rose by 21% and in Asia by 10%. In the European Union, it dropped by 20% – and why is that? The money goes to where the action is. Apparently, investors regard Europe as the continent of inaction, only generating poor growth figures. It demonstrates the European Union facing a competitiveness deficit.

Commissioner, you have to assure a level playing field for entrepreneurial activity in Europe to make our continent fit for global competition. We all know China.

I would like to draw your attention to several aspects of competition policy in 2009, of which many features are visible today. The main issue now is the consequences of massive State aid to the financial sector: states allocated taxpayers' money to prevent the collapse of the financial sector. Had we allowed a meltdown of the financial sector, the savings and pensions of millions of European citizens would have been buried too. But it goes without saying that State aid on this scale created distortions of competition. That is why it has to end as soon as possible and the money has to be paid back to taxpayers in Europe.

Commissioner, my first question therefore is: how temporary is the temporary framework, and how will it be phased out? I hope you will clarify this issue on behalf of Commissioner Almunia.

Another aspect is liquidity support of the European Central Bank to certain banks in order to keep them alive. I admit there is an interface between monetary and competition policy – but did its impact distort competition? That is my question.

Another issue is the set of rules for divestment. Work criteria for downsizing companies are sufficiently clear and fair. Now we should look at the future: what is going to happen, Commissioner? Member States have gone very far to recapitalise the financial sector by partly and/or entirely nationalising institutions with taxpayers' money. This will have to be unravelled. But once Member States start withdrawing from financial institutions to restore their private status, there is a danger that they will leave behind a dowry, a sort of wedding gift. Dowries may be used to prop up the position of financial institutions in the private market.

This is a feature we have often seen in the process of privatisation. I remember it too well in the postal sector. Governments propped up their postal provider just before entering the private market. In a letter, I reminded Commissioner Almunia of the long-lasting investigation into the German postal provider. The Commission is currently opening investigations into the British, French and Belgian postal providers as well, since these postal markets will be liberalised this year.

So, Commissioner, I ask you to be attentive to the phenomenon of dowry in the financial sector. Preventing a problem is better than going the long way of legal redress.

I thank you, Commissioner – and also Commissioner Almunia – for your cooperation, and I also thank the service of DG Competition which, as I know, is one of the best in the Commission.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, on behalf of Vice-President Almunia, who is unable to be here this morning, I would firstly like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Eppink, for his work on the report on Competition Policy 2009. I would also like to thank the rapporteurs in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection, and the Committee on Transport, Ms Koch-Mehrin, Mr Buşoi and Mr Cramer.

The Commission welcomes the positive tone of the report and the support expressed for our actions in the field of competition policy in 2009, in particular, in the context of the economic and financial crisis. We share your view that competition is essential to ensure a level playing field in the single market and to promote a sustainable exit from the crisis. This is why the Commission remains committed to enforcing its firm stance on anti-competitive behaviour and mergers.

The Commission takes note of the many requests for specific reports or studies – more than 10 of them. It is not feasible for the Commission to produce all these reports, due to our priorities and limited resources. However, as Vice-President Almunia announced to the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs in November, the Commission will analyse the effects on competition of the temporary State aid measures taken in the context of the crisis. This work will be difficult, but the crisis is a learning opportunity we simply cannot miss.

Secondly, I would like to restate here that these measures are indeed temporary. The Commission prolonged the crisis framework for State aid until the end of 2011 because the economic conditions are still uncertain. However, the gradual phasing out of these

measures has already started. Some measures have been terminated and others have been maintained under stricter conditions.

Thirdly, as regards private enforcement of competition rules, the Commission takes note of Parliament's support for the creation of a European form of collective redress, and of its request for specific EU legislation to ensure compensation for victims of infringements of EU antitrust law. The Commission will launch a public consultation at the beginning of 2011 on a European approach to collective redress. It then plans to adopt a communication based on the results of this.

Finally, I would like to refer to the concerns expressed about competition in specific sectors, such as energy, transport, the food supply chain and emerging digital industries. The Commission shares your concerns, and we will maintain our strong enforcement activities in these fields in close cooperation with the national competition authorities.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy*. – (DE) Mr President, competition policy is one of the most important, central policy areas of the EU. Good competition policy enables markets to function properly. Good competition policy also allows consumers to benefit from a wide variety of products at reasonable and affordable prices. Good competition policy also contributes to creating growth again in Europe. That is why it is so important, Commissioner, to include all the areas that you have mentioned in competition policy. It is also important to strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises, as they are the driving force behind growth in Europe. Market barriers must be abolished, which also means doing away with the excessive costs that still pertain where competition is not working, such as roaming charges on mobile phones, where competition still does not exist – something that needs to be changed.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the rapporteur, Mr Eppink, for his excellent work, and to the Commission I would say: be ambitious in your goals.

(Applause)

Cristian Silviu Buşoi, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection*. – Mr President, I would like to start by congratulating the Commission on its flexibility in applying the competition rules during the current financial and economic crisis. It is very important that the crisis is not used as a pretext to eliminate competition, and the Commission has already shown a very firm attitude against cartels, which is a good thing. We need to make sure that there are exit mechanisms and that we come back to normal market conditions as soon as possible.

There are some areas – and you spoke about that, Commissioner – where competition can be enhanced. These include the energy market, where regulated energy prices still distort competition; the completion of the single railway market can also bring important benefits to European travellers. The Commission should also be particularly careful concerning competition on the medicines market, especially with regard to those practices of originator producers which restrict the entry of generic medicines.

Furthermore, I call on the Commission to be firm in securing competition between public and private hospitals by means of bold action against cross-subsidies which favour public hospitals. The Commission needs to communicate the benefits of competition policy to consumers more effectively.

Michael Cramer, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Transport and Tourism*. – (DE) Mr President, I would like to start by thanking the rapporteur for his excellent cooperation.

Transport is also a decisive issue when it comes to competition. After all, transport is responsible for 30% of CO₂ emissions, which is why I am pleased to see that it has been accepted that transport should be included in the central demands of the Europe 2020 strategy.

However, we still have unfair competition and this is where the Commission needs to take action. For example, the aviation sector, which is the climate killer *par excellence*, enjoys an exemption from value added tax and duty on fuel. This means that the European taxpayers pay out EUR 30 billion every year for aviation, simply so that the airlines can offer intercity flights at the same price as a short taxi journey. The railways are required to bear the burden here. We have a mandatory rail toll for every locomotive for every kilometre travelled. This is a mandatory levy and has no upper limit. On the roads, it is left up to the Member States to decide whether they charge any tolls at all. The tolls mostly apply only on motorways and only to heavy goods vehicles weighing 12 tonnes or more. In other words, some of our Member States levy a high rail toll but no road tolls at all. We cannot allow this because it completely misses the point. After all, if we do not change mobility habits, we will never succeed in averting climate change. Yet this is something we have to achieve. That is why you must establish fair competition in the transport sector too.

Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (LV) Mr President, Commissioner, we are all lazy. If we can get away with not doing something, most people will indeed not do it. Business is no exception in this respect. The majority of entrepreneurs (I am convinced of this) dream of the possibility of being monopoly providers who can dictate terms, instead of having those terms dictated to them by consumers. Competition is exactly what ensures consumers receive not only low prices but also optimum quality. Unfortunately, in the European Union, we still have several sectors where there is no real competition. The first of these is energy. There are still isolated markets in several areas in Europe where there is no competition at all, for legally technical reasons. What is the result? Artificially high prices for consumers. A concrete example of this is the Baltic States and the gas market. As Commissioner Oettinger himself has admitted, consumers in Germany currently pay 30% less for natural gas than consumers in the Baltic States. Why is there competition on one side, but none in the Baltic States? This must change. There is a second sphere where there is no real competition, and that is the agriculture sector. Without even mentioning what effect subsidies as such have in the agriculture market, we have within Europe very unequal agricultural payments or subsidies in one Member State compared to another. What does this mean? It means that European consumers pay artificially high prices in many places and, of course, farmers also suffer. Ladies and gentlemen, I call on you to support this report, which concerns the Commission's work on 'Towards competition' in 2009. I shall remind you, however, that this work does not end with this, and that we have to extend the spheres where competition needs to be present. Thank you for your attention.

Antolín Sánchez Presedo, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Mr President, the 2009 report on competition policy is probably one of the most extensive and comprehensive reports drafted by Parliament to date – the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs has succeeded in incorporating the opinion of three other parliamentary committees – and it was produced after a period of five years following the implementation of two significant regulations, the Modernisation Regulation and the Merger Regulation, which

have played a positive role in competition policy. However, the implementation of the regulations could be improved if the priorities were better aligned, the cooperation efforts redoubled, the administrative burden alleviated and if there was convergence between national and EU laws.

The report includes the importance of public services in meeting the basic needs of citizens and we feel we need to emphasise this within the new framework established by the Treaty of Lisbon. Therefore, and taking into account the importance of the information society, support is being given to the aid aimed at offering suitable universal broadband coverage at affordable prices to our citizens, and we request that attention is paid to the development of roaming prices in the telecommunications field in subsequent reports.

Competition policy is key in financial services. The aid offered has contributed to stabilising and mitigating the effects of the economic crisis. The report highlights its provisional nature and that its extension must take place under stricter conditions and a level playing field must be re-established for the exit process in order to avoid any moral risks and, above all, so that the financial institutions that have not claimed State aid see their competitive position restored.

Three points are also emphasised in the financial arena: the transparency of financial information, the need for the European payment system to be accessible, transparent and to function in a non-discriminatory and efficient manner and, thirdly, the need to combat unusually high prices in cross-border transactions with payment cards. The report also raises concerns about small and medium-sized businesses and energy, and takes on board the recommendations of the High-Level Group for the dairy sector – which holds the view that strengthening the negotiating power of the producers and the new contractual relationships must be compatible with competition policy – and asks the Commission for a legislative initiative to facilitate individual or collective claims for compensation for damages caused by infringements of competition law, whilst avoiding the excesses of the US system.

I therefore congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Eppink, on his excellent work.

Sophia in 't Veld, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, first of all, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur. We have worked in tandem (me being last year's rapporteur), and that brings me to my first point.

It strikes me about these annual debates on competition policy that there is a very friendly and polite exchange of views, and then the Commission just carries on with business as usual because the Commission has the exclusive powers in this area. I think, at a time where we are discussing economic governance for the European Union, that should change. The European Parliament should have a much bigger role in shaping competition policies, and I therefore urge the Commission to follow, in particular, recommendations 3 and 4, and really seriously report back to the European Parliament about its recommendations.

Secondly, in my view, a report should be more than a mere summary of actions taken. It should be an analysis of the impact of the competition policies, and that is currently lacking. You say that you will do one on the temporary State aid framework because that is your priority, but we have been calling for such analyses for years: on green recovery, on State aid to innovation, on State aid to public services. That is long overdue, so I would ask the Commission to do more in-depth analysis.

Finally, I would urgently reiterate the calls we have been making – for years now – for a sector inquiry into online advertising and search engines. This is really long overdue, and I would like to hear from the Commission when they intend to conduct such an inquiry.

Philippe Lamberts, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, first of all, I would like to thank Commissioner Almunia, who is not here today but who, even though it is not the European Parliament's domain, spends a considerable amount of time with us in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and is therefore investing time in an ongoing dialogue with Parliament on these matters.

I would also like to thank the rapporteur. We often do this formally but, Mr Eppink, although our parties often disagree on many things, I must say that while drawing up this report, there were no taboo matters in our discussion. All points were fully addressed in a very constructive spirit, and this should be highlighted.

I would now like to move on to three points with which I believe the Commission should move forward. One, as was pointed out, is the importance of the financial sector, which, in truth, is given too much weight in the economy.

We know the financial crisis has meant that the financial groups that came through did so bigger and stronger. So there really is a problem of market distortion in that area, and this does not only relate to special State aid measures established by Member States to help their financial sector, but also, and we emphasised this in the report, various forms of direct aid from the European Central Bank (ECB) that are, I am sorry to say, not very transparent at all.

We therefore urge the Commission to focus on the way in which the ECB has helped the banks, because it is clear that the banks that went to the ECB to seek help benefited from a kind of aid that those that were better managed did not request. Banks that were properly managed, therefore, have somehow been victims of a market distortion.

The second sector is that of raw materials, particularly food commodities. We know that large agro-industrial businesses and major retailers have a market position that gives them far too strong an influence over price formation. A market survey on this issue is absolutely vital.

Another point, and not the least important, is tax competition. You know that most Member States, including my own and many others, practise forms of tax competition that are very harmful to the general European interest. These forms of competition must be stopped. I know that the Commission is beginning to take an interest in this issue once again, but I strongly urge Commissioner Almunia and Commissioner Šemeta to tackle this problem.

Moving on to my last point, we were pleased to note that Commissioner Almunia has already imposed fines in various sectors since the beginning of his term of office, particularly in the air freight sector. We also welcome the opening of the investigation into Google, which I think partially answers the point Mrs in 't Veld made a moment ago.

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

President. – Mr Lamberts, Mr Hans-Peter Martin has used his blue card to signal that he wishes to ask you a question. Are you willing to listen to him? Many thanks.

Mr Martin, you have 30 seconds to question Mr Lamberts on the matter.

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Lamberts referred to the special supports that banks have received from the European Central Bank. Perhaps he could explain in a little more detail what he means and how this worked? He also made reference to the fact that this support is to be abolished. How would he propose that we take control here, ensuring that the wrong people do not make a fat profit?

President. – That is a big question to answer in just thirty seconds; however, I have every confidence in Mr Lambert's powers of summation.

Philippe Lamberts, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, answering that kind of question in 30 seconds is clearly an almost impossible task.

What is the issue here? The European Central Bank (ECB) agrees to provide liquidity to banks that request it, in an unlimited way, accepting all kinds of assets as collateral for that liquidity. However, we do not have a very clear idea of the nature of those assets. We also strongly suspect that many of them are, as they say, syphilitic or toxic assets whose real market value is very difficult to determine and some of those assets might even be worthless.

Under such conditions, this therefore constitutes a direct form of aid. Clearly, if the ECB did not provide this liquidity in exchange for these guarantees, which are actually quite short-lived, then it is possible that some of these financial institutions would go bankrupt.

Finding an answer to this is not simple; however, in any case, the first step is to have transparency as regards those assets.

President. – Thank you, Mr Lamberts, for such a clear response on such a complicated issue.

Kay Swinburne, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – Mr President, firstly, I would like to congratulate my colleague, Derk Jan Eppink, on his comprehensive and well negotiated report, covering so many topics. Fundamentally, competition policy should be at the heart of the European single market and solid principles of competition should be built into all EU legislation. Competition should create a stronger marketplace for EU citizens and allow the EU to be more competitive on a global basis.

In the latest wave of financial services legislation, there is a danger that this principle is being lost. We must use every opportunity to create more competition in markets dominated by large market participants and create a more vibrant marketplace. In the derivatives legislation currently being negotiated, we can ensure that we do not create or reinforce monopolies by supporting open access to CCPs and the like, and by ensuring the availability of important data streams to all players.

In the upcoming review of MiFID, we must remember its original purpose of opening up Europe's equity markets to competition and, after its expansion to include new asset classes, we must ensure that the competitive principles are upheld, since a combination of these has actually significantly driven down trading fees for investors in the equities over the last three years.

When we consider reforms for auditors, credit rating agencies and other financial services providers, we can consider where the barriers to market entry lie, and work to break them down. I believe that standing up for competition in key industries is the way that we will generate the true growth potential of the EU and reinvigorate our economies in this ever-changing world.

Thomas Händel, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, according to this report, the Commission is following a successful policy on competition. However, we should not forget that unregulated competition can also lead to an increase in unemployment, so that the gap between the rich and poor grows ever wider.

In the European Union, free competition continues to take precedence over the social needs of our citizens. A fervent belief in free markets cannot mask the fact that these markets not only fail time and time again, but are also incapable of bringing about lasting social justice. A couple of procedures aimed at combating distortion of competition and price fixing will not be enough to resolve this problem. A fair and social internal market will only work with strong and just regulation. More work is urgently needed on this. For example, it is not acceptable for more and more institutions providing services of general public interest to find themselves exposed to private competition.

The report sets down pointers for the Commission's future policy on competition. There is an urgent need for much stronger consumer protection and for services of general public interest to be shielded from the rules of competition and removed from the control of cartels. It is also necessary to introduce a contractual clause that favours secure social progress and that is regarded with the same importance as the rules on competition in Europe.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – Mr President, it is not often that I have any good words to say about Gordon Brown, but he did act swiftly, decisively and effectively to deal with the banking crisis in the UK, even though I must point out that it was largely made worse by his disastrous tenure as Minister of Finance/Chancellor of the Exchequer for ten years.

However, the bank rescue in the UK was less swift than it might have been because of the consequences of EU competition policy. My distinguished colleague, Professor Tim Congdon, has written a pamphlet on this. The fact is that these matters should be handled at the national level and not at the level of the Commission. The Commission simply does not know what it is doing and should stay well clear.

In the last 15 seconds I have, I must address the singularly depressing speech made by Mr Lamberts when he talked about tax competition. Tax competition is why we have lower taxes. What he was advocating was an EU-wide fiscal policy, which would result in EU-wide higher taxes. That is what it is, and I would ask Mr Lamberts and his colleagues to please call it that next time.

President. – This is not so much a speech under the 'blue card' procedure as a personal statement. Mr Lamberts, I implore you to keep it brief, let us see if you can enlighten your colleague with your point of view in just thirty seconds, shall we?

Philippe Lamberts (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, Lord Dartmouth paints the Greens as advocates of high taxes for the sake of high taxes. I just want to ask you, Lord Dartmouth, one very simple question. If services like education, health and security have value, I guess that you have to find ways to finance them. Am I correct?

President. – No, we are not going to enter into a discussion on this.

Mr Dartmouth, you may respond to Mr Lamberts later in the corridor. However, what the regulations do not allow is for one question to be answered with another.

You have 15 seconds.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – *(opening words inaudible as microphone switched off)* ... the person who asked the question has the right to respond. You have invented new rules – your own rules – as a chairman. You are completely incorrect, sir.

President. – Yes, I do invent rules. We are inventing rules all the time and we are contributing to the progress of the democratic functioning of the Chamber. Thank you for recognising that.

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – *(DE)* Mr President, I would like to begin by commending you for permitting such dialogue. It is a little unfortunate that the Earl of Dartmouth did not understand that you had also allowed him this opportunity to reply. I believe it is a very positive thing when someone like Mr Lamberts comes forward with such concrete proposals and when we have a chance to engage in lively debate, so that people get to respond in a more direct way, which is exactly what we want in this House. Perhaps you will allow him the opportunity for a brief reply later on.

I would like to continue where Mr Lamberts left off. There is no denying that we need transparency in the banking system. The public is still quite unaware that these subsidies as a result of the financial crisis have actually done something quite unimaginable under EU standards. They make it clear that competition per se cannot always manage without subsidies when there are higher objectives at stake. However, what makes this entire business such a bitter pill to swallow is the fact that those banks that have received support are once again profiteering and, in some cases, actually going against common European interests. That is enough about the financial market.

The second point I would like to discuss is one you have all heard from me before – the question of pharmaceuticals. It finds it very regrettable that we have still not made the progress that has been possible and necessary for decades. It would indeed be a great step forward for Europe if citizens in my country, Austria, as well as in Germany and in other countries, only had to pay the same amount for pharmaceuticals as their fellow citizens in other EU Member States. This is the work of cartels and big business. I believe that the Commission has the opportunity and the duty finally to take action here.

The second aspect of this issue is pharmaceutical authorisation. Unnecessary trials are still taking place, both on animals and on human beings. A lot of work is duplicated unnecessarily. In the context of the European internal market, this is something that should have been resolved last century. I would once again call on you to take intensive action here.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE). – Mr President, our eyes are currently on the summit between China and the US, because those two economies are seen as being the world's two biggest economies. We are discussing when China will become the biggest economy, but that is based on a false assumption, because we forget that the European Union is the biggest economy, but that China and the US have the bigger markets. This is because of the lack of competition in the European Union across borders and within different areas.

It is a lack of competition that makes us look upon them, instead of us, as having the self-confidence of being in the lead. That is why it is important, in the future, that the report on competition should also focus on the lack of implementation of the legislation which is already in place, and also on the lack of competition in the European economy. We need

to do that in a number of areas. Also, to be the leading economy, we need to ensure that we are the most competitive economy.

Let me tell you a secret: we will never be the most competitive if we do not have competition. State subsidies and regulations hindering new entrants are preventing the European economy from being in the lead. That is why we must ensure that state subsidies are always there only in exceptional cases, where nothing else can be done, or when we can channel them in a way that supports the common good without distorting competition.

What we need to ensure is that we can allow for new entrants in as many areas of the European economy as possible. Competition is not about out-competing others. It is about allowing big companies to merge and grow bigger and bigger on the global scene, and about allowing new companies to open up to new innovations. We do have a lack here and it is the responsibility of the Commission to demonstrate that, and to take action so we can proceed together so that in the future, we will be looked upon as the leading economy.

Edit Herczog (S&D). – Mr President, competition policy is a cornerstone of European legislation. We agree that innovation, creativity and being better necessarily mean market advantage, but we do not accept that, just because someone is bigger and stronger with better connections to information and, in particular, special connections to government, these kinds of advantage should apply on the market, and we are very happy that the Commission is on guard here to ensure that they should not.

I would like to mention once again a new phenomenon: it is not market players but rather governments which seem, from time to time, to be playing by giving special advantages, in terms of competition policy, to some of their favourite companies. This is a very bad phenomenon and it goes back to party treasuries.

I would ask the Commission to move in this direction: let us have innovation, creativity and small and medium-sized enterprises, but do not allow any kind of misuse of information or power, either economic or political, on those territories.

Sylvie Goulard (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Eppink's report is quite remarkable, but I am a little afraid – and this has nothing to do with the rapporteur – that we are making the same points over and over again. It is rather like flogging a dead horse. Without doubt, I would join Mrs in 't Veld and Mr Lamberts in saying that we need to have proper monitoring of competition, and to think about what is happening in the agricultural sector, which has very few buyers and a huge number of producers – something that has never worried the Commission before, whereas if this had been the industrial sector, it would have immediately thrown itself into the buyers' cartel. We also need new rules for the Internet sector.

However, our relationship with the Commission is tremendously boring. It sends us a report which sweeps three-quarters of the subjects under the carpet. We respond politely that it is interesting and that something should be added to it; then everyone puts it away in a drawer.

I just wanted to say this today, and to repeat what Mr Hökmark said: the world is changing. It is very nice of us to say that State aid is not good, but the fact remains that China, Korea, the United States and others give State aid. I am not in favour of it. I am not a grassroots protectionist Frenchwoman; I am simply saying: let us open our eyes a little and stop dreaming!

Reinhard Bütikofer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, recommendation number 4 requires the Commission to issue reports on how it handles all future recommendations and to explain any disparities that might arise. I believe that this is a very sensible proposal and wish to make it more specific. Last year, Parliament decided during the relevant debate that we wanted to focus on fair and non-discriminatory competition for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Commission has done nothing in the interim. This recommendation is once again to be found in Mr Eppink's motion for a resolution.

I would like to hear from the Commission whether it now intends to implement this reiterated recommendation or I would ask them, at the very least, to tell us what it is that is preventing them from taking on board the particular concerns of small and medium-sized enterprises in this way.

My second point relates to the commodities sector. I am very pleased to find that this report deals with the lack of transparency in the commodities sector. I also welcome the fact that it deals with the question of speculation in commodities. However, I regret that it has not taken up the recommendation of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy as a whole, which suggests that we should not follow the proposal made by the French Presidency, namely, that the issue of speculation should be confined to agricultural commodities, but recommends that speculation in metals should also be included. In my opinion, this is just as important.

Vicky Ford (ECR). – Mr President, I would like to thank my colleague, Derk Jan Eppink, for his excellent report, but particularly to make a comment about the energy market, which the Commission is going to look at this year.

As other Members have pointed out, energy supply and pricing can vary greatly between different Member States. In the region I represent, nearly a quarter of households have no access to mainstream gas, and the vast majority of those are reliant on domestic heating oil. In the one month between November and December, pricing in that market rose by over 50%. Consumers are concerned (and very cold) – they are concerned about cartel pricing, and there are allegations of this.

It is right that this should be looked at by the domestic regulators first, but I am hearing similar concerns from other EU Member States. So I would like to ask the Commissioner: when you are looking at the energy markets this year, please do not forget those who live in very rural isolated areas.

Ildikó Gáll-Pelcz (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as you could see in our presentation yesterday, the strengthening of the internal market and the promotion of job creation are among the priorities of the Hungarian Presidency. Since an EU competition policy based on equal competitive conditions applied in all sectors is the prerequisite of the aforesaid priorities, I am very pleased by the creation of this report. However, ladies and gentlemen, this is now in the distant past. Times have since changed. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to draw the conclusions of this report, and I also find the fact that the European Parliament – that is, we, the Members – will be able to play a more active part in the shaping of competition policy in the future to be important. In this, however, I request the Commission's cooperation.

First of all, I request what I believe to be a necessity, that Parliament should be informed regularly about all initiatives launched in this field. Secondly, I ask the Commission, as the only competition authority with EU-wide competence, to report to Parliament annually

about the application of the recommendations made by it, and about any deviations from them.

I believe that it is important to realise – and in this I agree with my fellow Members – that competition policy cannot be managed vertically. Coordination is also required in all functional and regulatory areas. This, however, is the responsibility of the Commission. For this reason, it is essential to harmonise EU policies and the priorities defined in the EU 2020 strategy, which is aimed at supporting growth and employment.

Lastly, I too would like to mention small and medium-sized enterprises, whose involvement is indispensable and unavoidable for the growth of the entire European economy, including, of course, employment. However, the conditions of competition must be equal. This must be guaranteed by competition policy. I ask the Commission to pay special attention to SMEs and to provide equitable and non-discriminatory competitive conditions for them.

Peter Skinner (S&D). – Mr President, first let me congratulate Mr Eppink on the detailed work he has done on this report. Hopefully, he will continue to play a progressive role in this area.

I welcome this report on the state of play of competition policy for 2009. However, there are still elements of competition in the EU that need to be strengthened and clarified. I would encourage more cooperation between the Commission and the European Parliament in this field. That is the only way we will be able to maintain public confidence in the decisions that have been taken. Furthermore, it is imperative that the European Parliament be kept up to date on the action that is taken by the Commission, with a particular focus on SME policy.

I look forward to the reports and the investigations that have been highlighted in this report – at the last count, 11 reports, six investigations into different fields and the re-establishment of DG Competition's fiscal State aid unit. In particular, I strongly welcome the reiterated request for the incorporation of the basis for calculating fines, which we have already discussed. I think this is absolutely vital.

By the way, it was very interesting to hear earlier from the Earl of Dartmouth, speaking as he was as an aristocrat, about competition policy. As everybody knows, aristocrats in the United Kingdom have a huge focus on land concentration. Perhaps we ought to ask the competition authorities to look into that and see just how the aristocrats have been looking after their land across the European Union for all this time.

Ślawomir Witold Nitras (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, it is a pleasure to listen to this debate. I would like to thank Mr Eppink for his report. Knowing his approach, I look at the report with admiration and am pleased that it was he who drafted it. It is also a pleasure to listen to the speeches of fellow Members, but there is something which I feel I must say. We are concentrating, here, on the work of the European Commission. We are accusing it of not having a strong position or a policy and of not fighting protectionism, but quite honestly, our opponent or our greatest problem – Mr Hökmark spoke about the fact that the European economy is not competitive – is the Member States. Meanwhile, the European Commission very often has no option but – acting under pressure from Member States – to try to protect free competition as much as possible.

In this Chamber several weeks ago, we talked among other things about special legislation for the coal market. On that occasion, however, we did not hear Members talking about free competition, but could only hear the voices of people demanding protectionist

principles and the possibility of subsidising, for example, closed mines – that is what it was called – while in fact, the real issue was assistance for mines which are not going to be closed at all. We must, therefore, be consistent in our work, and that consistency is often lacking in this Chamber.

We have been talking about assistance for the banking sector. I fear that the European Commission, acting under that pressure from Member States, has only sanctioned that assistance, and today, when we talk about the report, which is, in fact, for 2009 – I agree, here, with the criticism – it seems to me that the report lacks an evaluation of the effects which that assistance has achieved and if, in reality, it has restructured the banking industry in a stable way. I expect, Commissioner, that this aspect – the evaluation of an important policy – should be present in the report.

The report also talks about the fact that the Commission is fighting protectionism, among others when we talk about the automotive sector, but there are examples – I come from Poland – where the best factory in the Fiat group was closed – perhaps not closed, but production was reduced – and production was transferred to Italy. This is obvious protectionism, and the European Commission should be fighting this problem.

I can give another example. In 2009, two Polish shipyards were closed. I come from a shipbuilding city in Poland, but the problem is bigger than two Polish shipyards. The problem is to do with the fact that, at world level, European competition policy forces the shipbuilding industry to fight mainly against the heavily subsidised shipyards of the Middle East, and today we have, in fact, closed down the shipbuilding industry in Europe through this competition policy, because we force them to compete against subsidised industries. It should be important to us for the shipbuilding industry in Europe to exist. Thank you, and I apologise for exceeding my speaking time.

Lara Comi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would argue that developing an effective competition policy and implementing it correctly from a methodological point of view is an extremely delicate and complex task, particularly during a crisis.

It is delicate, because applying it too rigidly could genuinely affect the impact it has, and could have serious consequences for the social sphere and the economic cycle. It is complex, because the parameters adopted may not necessarily apply across the board to all areas of the economy at such a delicate time. Therefore, the Commission should be congratulated for its work on the subject. It has managed to combine a rigorous method with the flexibility necessary in these economic conditions. Indeed, making provision to evaluate the ad hoc tools adopted at national level to end the crisis is evidence of an approach that is not only highly professional, but also sensitive.

European competition law is both wide-ranging in scope and highly specialised. This once again puts the European Union in the position of being a guiding light for its neighbouring countries, particularly the less developed ones. This helps prevent a separation and divergence between the countries leading the way and those following behind. Therefore, it is doubly important to ensure that this guiding light is not dimmed in any way. In my opinion, special attention should be paid to evaluating the various post-crisis scenarios that should begin to emerge in 2010.

It is very likely that this will mean re-examining the extent of the structural changes that we need to take into account and evaluating the current status of the various industries and sectors. Caution has to be the keyword at a time of such uncertainty.

I would urge the Commission to focus both on small and medium-sized enterprises and on youth employment, which is once more making competition a European-wide problem.

Sari Essayah (PPE). – Mr President, I would like to commend the report for including a very positive mention about SEPA, the Single Euro Payments Area. Time and again this Parliament has demanded a rapid SEPA migration, and the reasons are simple. The Commission's impact assessment quotes a study that SEPA would save EUR 300 billion in the EU economy in six years' time. These savings are due to increased competition via common standards and processes. This will also save time and stress for all Europeans who need to carry out payments in other countries.

I also strongly agree with the report when it states that the public economic support to banks and other companies in the economic crisis has distorted competition. Like many of my colleagues here this morning, I urge the Commission to provide an analysis of these distortions.

Let me add one more thought on the need for common standards and processes. A lot of inventions in the future will be based on information and communication technologies. We need more competition in the ICT business, and this could be encouraged by increased use of open-source code in Europe. I expect that Europe will, in this way, become more competitive in this crucial field in relation to the US and other major economic areas, as Mr Hökmark said previously.

Danuta Jazłowiecka (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the authors of the resolution under discussion rightly observe that the economic crisis was an exceptional challenge for EU competition policy. National and political interests were repeatedly victorious, not only over the rules of the free market, but also over common sense. The major economic crisis, the effects of which are still being felt to this day in the countries of Europe, was a significant determinant of competition policy in 2009. It was a period which saw the use of mechanisms and instruments whose main objective was to help troubled financial institutions as well as some large enterprises, and not to uphold the rules of a market economy, and the worst effects of this were felt by small and medium-sized enterprises.

Will what was done be effective in the long term? Only now are we finding out. Therefore, we should call on the Commission to prepare credible analyses which show the effect of this aid on the economy. This will not only allow an evaluation of what was done, but will also enable a rapid and effective reaction to similar threats in the future.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, competition policy plays a key role in guaranteeing the European economy's competitiveness, with the control of State aid being an integral part of this.

At the same time, during the current crisis, the European Commission has seen the need to approve State aid grants, especially for the banking sector, but also for other sectors which have encountered difficulties. Member States have therefore granted sizeable sums in the form of guarantee schemes, recapitalisation schemes and other forms of financing banking institutions' liquidity, with the aim of providing them with a source of funding and a guarantee against risks.

However, the European Commission must keep a close watch on the sector and submit plans for restructuring and regulating financial institutions to guarantee that they will not continue to adopt risky behaviour which jeopardises the European Union's financial

stability. Otherwise, State aid is only helping perpetuate financial difficulties in the European Union.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, the submitted report confirms the fact that we still have a long way to go in the EU as far as proper competition is concerned.

A good example of this is agricultural output, where both the EU and the individual states allow various subsidies and supports, thereby greatly distorting the competitive environment. Agricultural enterprises from the new Member States in particular are suffering considerably as a result of the incorrect subsidy policy of the EU. Transport is another area where it will be necessary to amend and improve the competitive environment in a fundamental way. I therefore consider it very important to adopt the proposals of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, which aptly draw attention to a distortion in competition between individual types of transport as well.

In any case, this is a good and inspiring report, and it is important for it to be employed effectively to improve the competition environment in the EU.

Alajos Mészáros (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, the situation created by the economic and financial crisis has left its mark on the tone of the Commission's report. Notwithstanding, it is a good report, as reflected by Parliament's resolution. However, there are points where work could be improved in the near future, primarily in the field of prevention and appropriate information. Without cooperation, we will not be able to recover from the crisis, and it is therefore very important for the Commission to assure us that it will continuously provide us with information about results already achieved. Compliance with, and enforcement of, EU competition policy rules is one of the keys to the success of the single market. There are still raw material markets in the field of energy policy, for example, where transparency needs to be increased. Similarly, competition is not fully guaranteed in every segment of the energy sector. This is why it is urgent to implement the second internal market package and the third energy package. Requesting a more thorough investigation of competition in another sector, namely agro-industry, is a very timely step. Through a study, we must identify the major suppliers and distributors who are responsible for distorting competition in the market.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, I would like to stress how important it is to draft clear competition rules which are helpful and useful to SMEs. They are especially important to the whole European economy, not to mention the huge innovation potential they offer. In this respect, I think that it would be advisable to include a chapter devoted to small enterprises, with an emphasis on fair competition. Competition policy should help promote and enforce open standards and interoperability. This would prevent a technological lock-in being applied by market players.

I would like to end by saying that the implementation of a successful competition policy and the unrestricted operation of the internal market are prerequisites for sustainable economic growth in the European Union.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – Mr President, let me concentrate on paragraph 90 of this report, which states that competition in agricultural production is a precondition for lower prices for consumers in EU countries. A bit of it is true, but I am afraid it misses the point completely. We are having a debate among ourselves, and in particular groups in this Parliament, about what is happening to the agricultural markets and why there is not fair

transmission of the final price that we, as consumers, pay for food to those who produce the food.

It is a very serious problem at a time when we are reforming agricultural policy, threatening to cut the budget for agriculture and not looking at the imperfections in this marketplace. So the report should say much more about that. The Commission is urged to look at competition in the agro-industrial sector: yes, please, and look at it too in the retail sector but then stop looking and do something about it! We are great at talking in this House, but we are not so good at action.

I have one other point in relation to competition. I make some complaints to the Commission on behalf of constituents. The small person gets no hearing against the state, and I would like the Commission to take this back: that there are some complaints which I, as a Member, have not ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Thank you Mrs McGuinness. It may be relevant in future debates of this nature to listen to the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development also.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the internal market should be free, effective, dynamic and innovative. Appropriate competition policy is the right tool for achieving this objective. If competition is operating properly in the market for goods and services, we can guarantee better quality, lower prices and greater choice for the consumer. It is good that we make these annual assessments of competition policy. Such an examination, with the benefit of hindsight, is very instructive. Effective use of the instrument of competition policy allowed an improvement in economic stability and moderation of the effects of the economic crisis for businesses and consumers. It is necessary to improve competition in the markets for medicines and energy. Let us remember that a monopoly, whether privately-owned or state-owned, restricts competition. It is worth stressing that changes to the common agricultural policy mean that subsidies and external support do not now restrict competitiveness.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, the Commission notes Parliament's call for more transparency, dialogue and information on competition policy. We will continue to inform you about important policy decisions relating to competition and will endeavour to address your requests in our response to your resolution, either in the next Report on Competition Policy or on an ad hoc basis, as requested by Mr Bütikofer and other Members.

I note your call for sector inquiries in a number of markets. Past experience shows that fair and firm enforcement itself produces positive effects on competition across a sector. Sector inquiries are not always the best way to enforce our rules in a given sector. They are very expensive in terms of resources and should be used only when the Commission's policy objectives make an inquiry necessary.

I can confirm again that the temporary crisis-related State aid measures are indeed temporary. I would like to pick up on a few of your questions in a really telegraphic way in the limited time available.

Firstly, on the investment and financial sector, consultation is ongoing on rescue and restructuring guidelines.

Secondly, on transport, the Commission is preparing a White Paper on the future of transport, which is due to be adopted in March 2011. This will outline several proposals for speeding up completion of the internal market for transport.

Thirdly, on services of general economic interest, the Commission will report on this in the first quarter of this year.

Fourthly, on the digital agenda, the Commission fully agrees with the importance of promoting a truly integrated digital internal market.

Fifthly, on SMEs, a level playing field for all companies, big and small, is essential for them to flourish. The Commission's enforcement of the competition rules is essential to enable this. We also have targeted State aid rules for SMEs, innovation, research and development and green technologies.

Next June, Vice-President Almunia will present to you the Report on Competition Policy 2010. In the meantime, he will keep you informed on the issues you have raised and, in relation to paragraph 4 of Parliament's report, the services of DG COMP will be instructed to respond to you in more detail.

President. – We will finish with the speech by the rapporteur, Mr Eppink, whom, of course, we congratulate, as the majority of his colleagues have praised his work as author of this report.

Derk Jan Eppink, *rapporteur.* – Mr President, I would like to thank the Commissioner, who is standing in for his colleague, for being here. I welcome the initiative of the Commission with regard to collective redress, which is a long-overdue initiative. It is also mentioned in the report, and I think it is in the interests of the consumers – provided it is well defined and well legislated. I think it is good. We will start with the Green Paper to see what the different opinions are. I welcome this.

In the banking sector, we have a very strange situation: State aid is on different levels in different countries, in different stages. In some countries, such as Spain, in the banking sector, the regional banks (*cajas*) in particular are in difficulty, and here, life-support from the European Central Bank is needed – although the ECB, as Mr Lamberts pointed out in 30 seconds, risks having many bad assets. This turns the ECB into a sort of bad bank – something we should not have.

In other countries, the states are trying to disengage from the banking sector, and here there is the danger of a dowry. I expect that you cannot reply to this issue of a dowry – it is something for the Commissioner – but it would be very unfair to other banks that did not get State aid if some that have been recovered or needed resuscitation suddenly got one. So here we have to look at the issue of the level playing field.

Finally, I come to the follow-up, because there were a few remarks by Mrs in 't Veld, Mrs Gáll and Mr Bütikofer which were spot-on. We had a report last year, we have a report this year and we will probably have a similar report next year. It all stays the same. It looks a bit like a Vatican-based ritual where we have the same things over and over again. I think that we have to look into the follow-up to the questions we have asked, and I propose that the rapporteur and the previous rapporteur get in touch with the Commissioner and with the Director-General of DG COMP to see what happens with the request we made.

We need to have a report that is properly implemented in terms of information provision. This is why I propose that we have a proper follow-up, in which Mrs in 't Veld will certainly support me, to see what the Commission is doing.

President. – Thank you, Mr Eppink. I am sure you will have noticed the reaction of your colleagues, and that in all likelihood, your proposal will have the necessary backing.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today, Thursday.

4. A sustainable EU policy for the High North (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Mr Gahler, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on a sustainable EU policy for the High North (2009/2214(INI)) (A7-0377/2010).

Michael Gahler, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, representatives of our Arctic neighbours who are following this debate, in my capacity as rapporteur, I am particularly pleased to be able to present to you today the result of over a year's work, carried out in cooperation with the shadow rapporteurs, other colleagues in the EU Arctic Forum, and numerous experts and representatives, some of them from the Arctic region itself.

We have achieved a broad consensus and believe that we have formulated a sustainable policy on the High North. The report analyses the new significance of the Arctic region and describes how the EU's policy in relation to our northern neighbours should be organised from the point of view of the European Parliament. My guiding principle here is the offer of cooperation with the states and institutions of our neighbours in the High North.

We are aware of the bilateral and multilateral cooperation already taking place with the Arctic states. Quite apart from the issues relating to the Arctic, Norway and Iceland are already closely involved in the European Economic Area and in cooperation under Schengen. The EU is already an ad hoc observer in the Arctic Council, but I would like to make it clear that I believe it desirable that the EU should be given permanent observer status. This is particularly the case because almost all policy areas of relevance to the region have been brought within the Community sphere in part at least. This offer of cooperation is formulated in this way because we, the EU, cannot take action or initiate any activity in the Arctic in our own right. We are largely dependent on the willingness of the immediately adjacent territories to cooperate with us.

In this report, I also focused on the human dimension. In pursuing each individual area of common policy, all those involved must never lose sight of the fact that the concerns of those living in the Arctic must be given due consideration. I am referring to the indigenous peoples in the countries, whose way of life and livelihoods follow the principle of sustainability, as well as for the other people living there.

We accept that these inhabitants of the Arctic region wish to develop their habitat; in other words, they do not want to see a conservation order placed on the area as it currently stands, turning it into something like a national park. That is why we are working with the partners to ensure that intervention in the ecosystem and in natural habitats always follows the highest possible conservationist principles. The EU is an attractive cooperative partner

for Arctic states because we have played a pioneering role in the relevant policy areas, such as protection of the environment and the combating of climate change. Thus, the question of whether or not the world's largest internal market pursues an ambitious environmental policy makes a vital difference for this region.

The EU is also an attractive cooperative partner because we are obvious customers for the commodities provided by the Arctic – not just oil and gas, but also rare ores, for example. We should follow the good examples provided here, for example, in the cooperation between Norway and Russia in the Shtokman Field in the Barents Sea. The highest Norwegian environmental standards are applied here as the partners cooperate in extracting these mineral resources. I hope that the same will apply to the cooperative agreement reached between Russia and BP in recent weeks for exploration in the Arctic Sea. In future, our monitoring satellites will provide valuable support, both in the environmental sector and in the opening up of new shipping routes, such as the Northeast Passage. Cooperation in this area will make it possible to shorten shipping routes to Southeast Asia, for example. For the EU, which accounts for about 40% of the world's commercial fleet, this is an important factor, particularly from a financial perspective.

Our Framework Programme for Research offers valuable support for further scientific cooperation between the various Polar institutes in their research stations in the Arctic. Our neighbours in the High North know the EU to be a competent cooperative partner. However, there is room for improvement when it comes to the formulation, coordination and implementation of our policies. Improvement could be achieved by bringing together the responsible areas within the Commission under the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and by establishing an appropriate body in the EEAS. In addition, an Arctic information centre to gather and evaluate all the relevant information would also further improve our database. The development of a circumpolar cofinancing and programming mechanism involving all the partners in the High North would also be an important instrument for better, more efficient cooperation in respect of research and development.

I am confident that this draft policy document will provide better guidelines for a comprehensive and successful Arctic policy in the EU that will also benefit our northern neighbours.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, early last year, Vice-President/High Representative Ashton took the initiative of proposing a debate on the Arctic region. The plenary debate has helped us to receive your views and to illustrate the importance we attach to Arctic cooperation as part of the external relations of the European Union.

We engage with the Arctic region on many levels. Firstly, both the Union and Member States have active research policies in the region. Secondly, we pursue solid environmental and maritime policies. Thirdly, our diplomacy in the fight against climate change addresses the core origin of Arctic transformations. And fourthly, we continue to take action in favour of indigenous peoples worldwide, including those living in the Arctic.

While we acknowledge that our dialogue with all circumpolar Arctic indigenous peoples could be improved, 2010 has witnessed the beginning of a fruitful and wider process of interaction, which we will certainly pursue in the years to come.

When dealing with access to the Arctic and the exploitation of its resources, we must live up to our reputation as a responsible consumer of raw materials and energy resources,

adhering to the highest safety and environmental standards. In parallel, we will firmly seek fair treatment of our interests, including those of our companies.

We are pleased to see that these areas are covered by Parliament's High North report, along with valuable proposals on how to proceed in the future. This report is an important contribution to the gradual building of the European Union's Arctic policy, and I would like to thank Michael Gahler for taking this initiative forward.

The initiative is particularly praiseworthy, as the rapporteur and several other MEPs facilitated an interesting dialogue with Arctic third parties and civil society, in which we participated actively. The various perspectives are present in the final report, demonstrating the European Union's commitment to listen to, and work with, all Arctic stakeholders.

We are now opening a new phase in the development of EU Arctic policy. Parliament's report will become the third pillar of its basic architecture, following the 2008 Commission communication and the 2009 Council conclusions. These three texts are consistent and offer a responsible and positive message to the Arctic partner countries and the people living across the region. We seek to promote a safer, sustainable Arctic. We respect the international agreements and arrangements, and would like to cooperate in their development and enhancement.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the Norwegian-Russian delimitation agreement on the Barents Sea, which was signed last year, as a reference point for long-term peaceful cooperation in the overall circumpolar Arctic region.

The European Union would like to see a reinforced and efficient Arctic Council, in which key decisions on the future of the region are agreed and implemented. We would like to participate in the Arctic Council as a permanent observer to share our solid experience in international regional cooperation, and we are particularly grateful for Parliament's endorsement of this endeavour.

The High North report will give the European External Action Service and the Commission a robust stimulus in our external action concerning the Arctic region. I believe that its messages and approach are timely and appropriate.

Parliament's High North report will also inform our own progress report on EU Arctic policy, which the Council has asked us to deliver later this year. Our reporting will be addressed to both institutions, Council and Parliament, and we hope that it will be to your joint satisfaction.

Inese Vaidere, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (LV) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should firstly like to thank Mr Gahler for his carefully prepared report. I am genuinely pleased that the European Union's policy towards the High North is one of those areas to which the European Union has turned in relatively good time. Significantly rich resources – around a quarter of the world's unexplored oil and gas resources, biogenetic and fish resources, minerals – may be found in the Arctic. It also offers new maritime transport opportunities. Melting of the ice cap has resulted in a shipping route to the countries of Asia that is about 40% shorter. The potential of the Arctic is impressive. That is why it must be husbanded responsibly. Both irresponsible exploitation of resources and ill-considered transport flows can have serious ecological consequences. At the same time, it has to be recognised that using the riches of the Arctic can open new possibilities for resolving not only energy problems, but also raw material and food-related problems. There is stiff competition between the world's great powers over who is to have the lion's

share in managing and exploiting these resources. Although approximately 3.7 million people live in the Arctic, representing several tens of indigenous peoples, it can nevertheless be regarded to a certain extent as belonging to the world in common. For the time being, the United Nations has not confirmed privileges for any nation in the Arctic and, hopefully, will not do so in the future. That is precisely why our policy must be responsible. The European Union must develop a specific, coordinated strategy for all spheres associated with the High North, and agree the funding for that policy and the sources of that funding. Climate change, the welfare and development of the local population, and energy security issues must also be taken into account. In order to implement that policy, permanent observer status on the Arctic Council would be important. Although we have no direct sea frontiers with the Arctic, the European Union can become a leader in exploring the region in respect of both its resources and new shipping routes, and in securing a high standard of environmental safety. Thank you.

Liisa Jaakonsaari, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (FI) Mr President, to begin with, my sincere thanks go to the rapporteur, Mr Gahler, for his constructive cooperation. Certainly the best acknowledgement of this came from Commissioner Füle, when he said that this report would become the third pillar of EU Arctic policy.

It is not any wonder that Arctic policy is becoming central to international policy, since, just as the Member who spoke before me said, the Arctic region has a third of the world's as yet undiscovered natural resources: minerals, gas and oil. Climate change and competition for these natural resources are issues that are connected, but what is really driving the trend is obviously the global economy. Fortunately, developments in the Arctic region have been steady and based on a willingness to cooperate.

In the future, Arctic policy will be a test of whether together, we can increase stability or, on the other hand, cause new conflicts. It is important that natural resources are exploited responsibly and carefully in order to avoid the 'gold rush' phenomenon and catastrophes of the sort that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico.

It is important that we have a balanced report and the message that the Arctic Council should be reinforced and that the European Union will be more robustly involved there in its capacity as observer. We should not just barge our way in, however, but exercise diplomacy, negotiate, engage in sound political cooperation and, above all, be at the forefront when it comes to assessing environmental impact. I think that it is excellent that the report mentions the importance of an Arctic Information Centre and also states that the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland, would be a good place to locate it.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FI) Mr President, I wish to express my sincere thanks to the rapporteur, Mr Gahler, as well as all the shadow rapporteurs. We think that we have worked excellently together and it is important that the owninitiative report is adopted and that a proposal is made based on it.

The report argues strongly in favour of heavy future investment allowing people in the Arctic region to survive there, and investment in conditions of employment, transport and the environment. I also think that the view it takes regarding the need to recognise the position of the indigenous nations, especially the Sami, is of particular importance. The Sami are Europe's only indigenous people and the EU, that is the Commission, Parliament and the Council, must cooperate equally with them.

The report also acknowledges the status of the Arctic Council, which Commissioner Füle even said the EU was willing to reinforce. I was, however, really quite disappointed with Commissioner Füle's appraisal that cooperation in the Arctic region was progressing gradually. Of course, the EU must show drive, and there must be investment and a desire to step up cooperation in the Arctic. That must not be allowed to progress only gradually, almost as if we were only using one hand: it must be one of the priorities.

Finally, I want to say that I am also pleased that there is to be investment in research into the Arctic region, and that the report mentions the University of Lapland as a possible centre for this. The University of Lapland deserves praise for being the only university, the only agency, that has really worked to ensure that such a centre would be established, and has devoted much time and effort to this.

Indrek Tarand, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, firstly, I would like to express my gratitude and give my sincerest congratulations and compliments to the rapporteur and fellow shadow rapporteurs for their good cooperation and understanding. I would also like to thank my fellow Green Members for their cooperation and contribution.

We can finally say that we have come up with a decent document allowing us, the European Union, to proceed in a fairly reasonable manner, taking into account all the interests of all stakeholders. Even though the Greens justifiably think that we should be even more radical, we are still glad that this report takes our worries and concerns into account, such as the proposals we made to the rapporteur concerning the fact that scientific data clearly demonstrates that the Arctic ecosystem is currently going through massive climate-related changes and that this situation requires a precautionary and scientifically robust approach to be taken to any future development in the Arctic.

That is why we called for further scientific studies, within the framework of a multilateral agreement to be completed, to inform international understanding and decision making for the Arctic ecosystem before any further major development goes ahead. We thank the other groups for accepting that. This is an example of how to put things in a congenial form for our wide range of different constituencies. There are some sceptics in this room who have stated that the Arctic region does not deserve our attention, but it does, particularly with Iceland likely to become the 28th member of the EU.

The Arctic is 'cool'. This is not because of climate change and the consequent warming up of the normally cold High North. The Arctic is also 'cool' because of the lucrative possibilities emerging on the horizon, even though they bring with them very complex and difficult problems. That is why I think politicians who tackle these problems in a responsible and politically subtle manner are 'cool' politicians, as are those of us who will vote for Mr Gahler's report today.

Konrad Szymański, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the Arctic is definitely changing. The most obvious results of these changes are the possibility of establishing new transportation and trade routes, and the possibility, which is already clearly in view, of exploiting natural resources and extracting oil and gas. World reactions to these changes are chaotic. On the one hand, we have the very constructive Norwegian-Russian delimitation agreement on the Barents Sea, while on the other, we also have the Russians attempting to pursue a policy of *faits accomplis*. I think there is a huge role to be played here by the European Union and the international community. We give encouragement for this in the report, and it has been expressed well there. The second matter to which we have drawn attention is the necessity of achieving a guarantee of equal, non-discriminatory access to

transportation routes. Neither regulatory nor financial considerations should be an obstacle in this equal access to routes. This has all been expressed well in the report. Therefore, we will be pleased to endorse the report in the vote.

Sabine Lösing, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, many thanks to Mr Gahler for his report. It is clear, also from this report, that there is enormous interest in the natural resources of the Arctic region. As a result of climate change, oil and gas and other resources can be extracted increasingly easily. The issue of making better use of shipping routes has already been discussed.

The logical consequence of this is that pollution will increase in the region. Industrial development – in particular, through the extraction of oil and gas, the expansion of commercial fishing and increased shipping traffic – will all necessarily lead to the disturbance, or perhaps even destruction, of this highly sensitive ecosystem, with devastating consequences.

Unfortunately, this report deals in generalities and does not contain any effective strategies for combating these dangers. A point that is not mentioned is the fact that the EU is not alone in recognising the increased geostrategic significance of the Arctic. The bordering states of Russia and NATO members USA, Canada, Denmark and Norway have already begun militarising the Arctic region and intend to protect their interests there.

Climate change has led to this situation in the Arctic. We need to prevent the catastrophic progress of this change, something that can only be achieved through a rapid changeover to renewable energy sources. However, this strategy takes a diametrically opposite approach.

We, the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, demand that the Arctic should not be allowed to become the next geopolitical hotspot. In common with numerous environmental organisations, we are calling for a moratorium on new oil extraction projects in the Arctic. A treaty needs to be agreed – similar to the Treaty on the Antarctic – that prohibits the extraction of mineral resources in the region. Last but not least, we are calling for the immediate demilitarisation of the region and therefore for the establishment of the Arctic as a demilitarised zone.

Because my group and I are unable to support the results of the own-initiative report presented here, the GUE/NGL has submitted an alternative report.

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

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D). – (FI) Mr President, I would like to ask how the representative of the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left thinks it possible that we could achieve some sort of moratorium when none of the actors or countries in the region wants one. How would the indigenous peoples view it if the European Union were to tell them what to do from above? Parliament has already committed one sin, the ban on the sale of seal products, which has angered them a good deal. Why should we annoy them even more? Now it is diplomacy and cooperation that are needed.

Sabine Lösing (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Mr President, I am not in favour of that and, of course, it is not possible to impose this from above. The question remains, however: Who was consulted? Which states are involved? Which indigenous peoples are affected? Was there any consultation with the people who may benefit from the situation, or with those who may lose their livelihood? I think that further dialogue is needed. The talks held so far are

not enough. We need to try to keep this dialogue as broad as possible, also consulting with wider sections of society, possibly including the indigenous peoples in particular.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Mr President, first of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation for the sterling work done by rapporteur Gahler.

The Arctic is of strategic importance, especially now that the warming of the Arctic region seems to have opened up opportunities for transport and resource extraction there. It is also an area where the environment is very fragile, especially as a result of pollution from Europe, North America, Russia and China. The fact that national claims to the Arctic are not always clear is a complicating factor. Although the EU will not have access to the Arctic coastline before the accession of Iceland, the EU does have Member States in the Arctic region.

I therefore support an EU strategy for the Arctic regions which will position the EU squarely alongside the other major powers, in particular Russia, which is clearly bent on exploiting this region economically. If the economic activities intensify over the coming years, then it will be important that we ensure a proper balance between the environment and economics and, in doing so, that we involve the local population. Securing an observer status for the EU in the Arctic Council would be a good step in the right direction.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, as we know, the Arctic's untold mineral resources have made the area the subject of heated dispute. It is estimated that 90 billion barrels of oil alone lie untapped under the ice. Inevitably, there is a certain feeling of unease that British Petroleum of all companies, having caused the oil catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico last year, is now to be allowed to extract resources in this sensitive natural environment, where conditions are far more extreme than in the Gulf.

After all, the fact is that the Arctic region already provides the final resting place for the world's mercury emissions. Nonetheless, in view of the global demand for energy, it is probably unrealistic to expect a decision to be taken to forego the Arctic's oil resources. It is to be hoped that the European Union, in its role in the Arctic Council, will ensure that better safety standards are put in place, so that the Arctic's wildlife does not suffer a similar horrific fate to that in the Gulf of Mexico in the wake of the recent oil disaster.

In addition, from the EU's perspective, the Arctic is also of essential importance for the development of new world trade routes. If it were indeed possible to open up a new shipping route between Europe, Asia and North America, this would immediately circumvent piracy in Somalia, while also saving the EU a lot of money because the Atalanta Mission would no longer be necessary. Of course, this is to assume that the indigenous Inuit populations would not be driven to similarly desperate measures such as piracy as a result of losing their livelihoods. This is something that needs to be kept in mind both when planning shipping routes and when drilling for oil.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, I too, of course, would like to thank Mr Gahler for his very good draft resolution and his fruitful cooperation.

For me, the most important matter during work on this report was the increased significance given to research into and monitoring of environment change, because the information gained is crucial in making political and economic decisions. It looks as if economic matters like fisheries, transport and natural resources are the main object of the European Union's interest. This is a pity, because there is no doubt that science allows us to assess what influence economic changes have on the environment in the region. An influence which

is significantly greater than in other regions. What exactly is this influence? Only the experts can tell us.

Unfortunately, the openness of research in the Arctic is being increasingly restricted by the states which have access to the Arctic Ocean. Even in areas covered by international conventions and treaties, in the last two or three years, there has been a significant reduction in freedom of activity and research, often under the pretence of protecting the environment. Climatic and oceanic processes in the Arctic have a significant effect on climate and environment change, so freedom of research is extremely important for understanding what is going on, not only in the Arctic itself, but more importantly here, where we are. Furthermore, the work which has already been completed on these issues by scientists from countries outside the Arctic and the money which has been spent entitle us to make our voice heard on matters concerning the northern polar region.

Diana Wallis (ALDE). – Mr President, I should like to thank Mr Gahler for his very careful and detailed report, and indeed for his willingness to compromise. However, I fear that we have produced the proverbial Christmas tree – albeit it post-Christmas – of wishes, and of wishes that obscure the main political point.

Our previous debates on Arctic policy in this Chamber provoked, indeed, the Commission communication. We insisted very clearly then on the protection of the fragile Arctic environment in a coherent way – on protection of this last wilderness, which is now an environmental flashpoint.

There seems to have been a very subtle shift – an undertow – in our thinking, towards security: security of energy supply and security to use resources. This has been confirmed by the agreement this weekend between Rosneft and BP – BP of Deepwater.

As the Commission and other commentators have persistently pointed out, there are many, many regulatory gaps in the Arctic. The EU's environmental footprint there is not light.

The regulation is piecemeal and unfocused. The field is open to multinational companies. We could do better. We previously said we wanted to do better. We wanted a more coherent approach. I wonder what has changed, and I think our citizens might ask what has changed.

Struan Stevenson (ECR). – Mr President, I, too, congratulate Michael Gahler on a well-balanced, excellent report. Despite the challenging nature of the environment in the Arctic, the rising price of oil has stimulated international interest in drilling in that zone. We all know that oil was first produced in 1968 from Prudhoe Bay on the Alaskan North Slope, but many areas of the Arctic have not yet been explored.

A 2008 US geological survey estimated that areas north of the Arctic Circle have 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil – technically recoverable oil – and 44 billion barrels of natural gas liquids. Now this represents between 13% and 20% of all undiscovered oil in the world. Needless to say, the recovery of so much oil will have a dramatic impact on the Arctic and may cause ecological disasters on a global scale, so I think we have to ask ourselves whether it is wise to embark on such a project at a time of determined efforts to sever our dependency on fossil fuels and to aim ultimately for a CO₂-free society.

Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL). – (DA) Mr President, for some reason, reading the Commission's communication on the Arctic makes me think of a cat licking its lips at the prospect of a saucer of cream. Global warming and the melting of the ice at the North Pole are certainly opening up new opportunities: natural resources, oil, fish, shipping and so

on. We have heard all about this. However, I think it is important for the EU not to get too excited, as it does not have any coastline along the Arctic Ocean. As a Dane, it strikes me as rather pathetic that Denmark is being used as one of the justifications for the EU's Arctic connections. The fact of the matter is that Denmark's only connection to the Arctic is via Greenland, which, in a referendum 26 years ago, decided to leave the European Union.

Likewise, the EU should not expect too much in relation to Iceland, either. The decision on Iceland's membership must be taken by the Icelandic people alone, without pressure from the EU. There is absolutely nothing to indicate that there is a majority in favour of EU membership there.

Thus, instead of seeing ourselves as a potential Arctic power, the EU should perhaps recognise its geographic location and instead work to attain good neighbourly relations with the countries that are actually situated in the Arctic. This includes our friends in the western Nordic countries, Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. It should be the job of the European Parliament, in particular, to ensure this.

Timo Soini (EFD). – (FI) Mr President, this is an important issue, and because Finland is situated in the north, I am familiar with these matters. For once, I can agree with my Finnish fellow Members that they in Lapland and at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi know about these things. I also agree about the position of the indigenous peoples.

I will vote in favour of this report, although my biggest criticism is targeted at the climate change claims, according to which we should have an agreement based, as it were, on the views of the EU. Emissions trading in the EU has failed completely. In 2008, it was revealed that there had been abuses, VAT swindles and many other scams to the tune of EUR 5 billion. Furthermore, these have grown steadily in number. Emissions trading simply does not work; it is harmful. To take its place, we need a system of specific emissions, as there is with vehicles, where one can measure who is doing the emitting and what is being emitted, and not engage in an international trade in indulgence where people buy the right to pollute. This is an important matter.

The Arctic issue is also important, though I am not very sure how it will progress when I consider the recent action taken by the EU. The things that the EU touches do not necessarily go ahead. The Danish Member spoke here sensibly about the regions which are there. They are regions with sovereign rights, which they may exercise to take decisions on their own matters.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, I would first of all like to congratulate my colleague, Michael Gahler, for the excellent report he presented. This report encourages the Council and Commission to outline a specific EU Arctic policy, while highlighting that Iceland's possible accession to the European Union would turn the Union into one of the Arctic's coastal entities.

As this Parliament's rapporteur for Iceland, I would like to stress that this country has Arctic priorities compatible with the European Union. These are strengthening the Arctic Council's political and administrative role, followed by ensuring the region's sustainable development and, lastly, I would like to remind you about supporting the indigenous populations' rights. The fact as well that both Iceland and the European Union are currently in the process of devising an Arctic strategy may provide an opportunity to coordinate both policies, among other reasons, with regard to the European Union's application for permanent observer status in the Arctic Council.

I wish to conclude by saying that the European Union can obviously contribute to effective multilateral governance in the High North. I would also like to tell Mr Søndergaard that I listened very closely to what he said about the majority in Iceland. I believe that we are facing a lengthy process which could go through numerous changes. In my view, we are in the position to encourage a responsible pre-accession process and a mainly balanced debate in this country about the European Union.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – (LT) Mr President, I would like to offer my compliments to my fellow Member, Mr Gahler, who, despite coming from southern Germany, has demonstrated a remarkable knowledge and love of the Arctic and the High North. Some colleagues have said that countries should deal with problems that arise individually and that there is no need for so much coordination here. I categorically reject this opinion. It is precisely the European Union, which has the greatest experience of how to work together and really go into uncharted territory, which should play a very important role in this region. It is, after all, clear – either confrontation, an uncertain scramble and conflicts, or peaceful cooperation and a region that could be an example to other countries around the world. One other dimension – profit, or economic benefits, or the environment and conservation. I believe that the European Union, which always led the way in the fight against climate change, must continue to place more emphasis on the second dimension when harmonising both approaches.

Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE). – (GA) Mr President, the Arctic area is changing significantly as a result of climate change, with ice and snow melting. New shipping routes are opening up, fishing grounds are available and there are more and better opportunities for viable oil and gas exploration.

The EU is playing an active role in Arctic issues. For example, the EU is a major contributor to research and development funding via the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development. The European Parliament is actively involved in ongoing dialogue with elected representatives from the Arctic through the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic region, and as chairman of the SINEEA delegation, I represent the European Parliament on this important body.

In September, Parliament hosted the biannual meeting of the standing committee for the first time. The conference was a great success, which enabled the European Parliament to deepen and to strengthen its relationship with the Arctic nations.

Edit Herczog (S&D). – (HU) Mr President, I do not speak as a Member living at the Arctic Circle either; I only wish to warn everyone that the North Pole does not only hold economic heritage and energy heritage, but it is also one of the greatest examples of our natural heritage. It is therefore very important that the companies that are going to conduct explorations and drillings in that area do not go there with the profit-mongering mindset of the gold diggers of old, but instead with the sense of European responsibility that took shape by the 20th and early 21st century. Let us not forget that work there will have to be performed under extremely harsh weather conditions and through the use of new technologies. It is of the utmost importance that we do not make concessions in this, and that we apply rules, standards and requirements to these companies, which enable the technical management of this issue at the most up-to-date technological standard, while financial funds should be available to prevent any kind of natural disaster, such as the one we have seen in the case of Deep Horizon. It is extremely important to stick to the proper order: Planet, people and product ...

planet, people and product. The product in this case is, of course, the gas and oil reserve. Thank you very much for your attention and congratulations to the rapporteur.

Birgit Schnieber-Jastram (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Gahler, and all the shadow rapporteurs. It is quite true to say that Europe needs to adapt continuously to new realities and to deal with changes in the balance of political power. In relation to Arctic policy, this means: we must understand that the Arctic states wish to develop the region themselves, but that they are open to cooperation. They are not interested in new treaties, but want to see existing regulatory treaties being developed further.

Climate change and new shipping routes do not solely entail risks, but can also offer opportunities. In relation to the Arctic, this means the EU has an opportunity for greater cooperation and development. After all, no one can combat the effects of climate change on their own, just as no one can develop the potential of the Arctic region on their own. In addition, the European Union has a sustained interest in the safe development ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Mitro Repo (S&D). – (FI) Mr President, the riches of the Arctic are not just its huge energy resources and new shipping lanes, but also its indigenous peoples. It is not an Arctic museum, but home to three and a half million people. That is why they need to be listened to. No one has the right to rape and plunder that region.

In the future, we will obviously see a lot of mines, industry and ships there, and with them a growing threat of environmental disasters. We need to prepare for these responsibly. It is a challenging task there to salvage nature, which is especially vulnerable in the region.

New research at the University of Lapland shows that, surprisingly, the EU already has a lot of power in the Arctic region. That is why it should be more active and responsible. It should invest in the region financially and tangibly. This will also depend on Iceland's possible future membership. I, too, think that the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi is the best place for an Arctic Information Centre.

Riikka Manner (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, Commissioner, firstly, I wish to congratulate the rapporteur for producing an excellent, balanced report. The global interest in northern regions has increased a good deal in the past few years, reaching new levels, as has been said. Consequently, it is vitally important that the European Union also takes an active role in this and, furthermore, actively endeavours to acquire a role as a permanent observer in the Arctic Council.

As has already been mentioned, these regions have enormous potential, as regards their natural resources, for example. We need a bold vision and cooperation, but also financial investment, so that the people who live in the region can sustainably exploit what it may have to offer.

Like many of my fellow Members, I am also very pleased that the report makes special mention of an Arctic Information Centre, the skills and expertise of the University of Lapland and the excellent facilities that exist there.

Alfreds Rubiks (GUE/NGL) . – (LV) Mr President, I have no doubt that the subject we are discussing today is very significant, and as I see it, this century will witness a struggle – between nations, between governments – to gain benefits from the Arctic. In this respect,

then, I approve of our discussing such a question today. On what do I base such a conclusion? We observe that China is even now building an icebreaker. We observe that a whole string of nations that do not border on northern seas want to become members of the Arctic Council, and I am pleased that the European Union is and will become such. There are two aspects, however. The first, to my mind, is that I would recommend that the Commission takes care, in the days to come, that the region does not become militarised, for already ...

Anna Rosbach (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, this report contains fine words on climate concerns and environmental considerations, but in reality, it is about the EU's hunt for resources in the Arctic. It talks about the expected quantities of oil, gas, minerals, forests and fish that the EU will be able to exploit in the near future. It states that the EU has large areas of land in Sweden and Finland, but does not mention that these are Swedish and Finnish areas. It also claims that the Union has exclusive competences with regard to the conservation of marine biological resources. I am not sure that the Greenlandic, Russian and Canadian Inuits would agree with that.

Just because the Arctic is sparsely populated does not mean that anyone can go there and help themselves. The area cannot support mass tourism, overfishing and the plundering of raw materials on a massive scale. The Arctic is an extremely sensitive area with a tradition of cooperation, and the majority of the Arctic countries are simply not members of the EU. In fact, Greenland actively withdrew from the EU, as Mr Søndergaard just mentioned.

IN THE CHAIR: ISABELLE DURANT

Vice-President

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE). – (SV) Madam President, I would like to thank Mr Gahler for an excellent initiative and an excellent report. I think it is well-balanced and takes into consideration those who want to exploit natural resources as well as those who are seriously concerned about the impact on the climate.

I believe that the best form of protection for the Arctic would be a global climate agreement, but in the meantime, we must draw up more short-term solutions in order to limit the warming of the Arctic. I would like to see the European Parliament acknowledge that emissions of carbon black are contributing, to a large extent, to the warming of the Arctic. I would therefore like to call on the Commission to make the necessary amendments to the directive on national emission ceilings for certain pollutants to also include carbon black emissions.

Kriton Arsenis (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, I agree with numerous fellow Members, especially Mrs Herczog and Mr Repo, who referred to the environmental importance of this area and the importance of protecting the rights of nationals. This is a virgin area a long way away. However, there are people living there, people with a culture. The environment in this area is extremely important. It is a crucial area in terms of combating and adapting to climate change. I am truly saddened when I see the European Union participating in this race to see who will be the first to exploit the oil reserves in this area, now that the ice is melting. The fact that others are doing so does not justify our doing the same. Our voice must always express our values and we must always take action to protect these resources and achieve a low carbon economy.

Miloslav Ransdorf (GUE/NGL). – (CS) Madam President, there are three main issues arising in relation to the Arctic. The first is the issue of energy, and there has been talk here of oil and gas, and in the future, there will be methane as well, since there are about 300 years worth of reserves of usable methane in the permafrost. EU bodies have, in the meantime, not looked into this issue in any way.

The second issue is transport. The opening up of the northern route shortens the journey to the Far East. From Hamburg to Seoul will take 21 days. If this possibility is taken into account, it will greatly reduce costs, and contribute to closer contacts between the two regions.

The third issue is the environment, because the exploitation of energy resources and greater transport volumes will bring a series of environmental risks to this region. In my opinion, it would be good to draw up a plan ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE). – (LT) Madam President, I would like to offer my congratulations to the rapporteur, Mr Gahler, on initiating a very important and necessary European Parliament report on the High North and on responding to the European Commission's recommendation for the formulation of an EU Arctic policy with very specific and all-embracing proposals: from the inclusion of local inhabitants in the dialogue and stability and security in the region to future projects, environmental dimensions and climate change. A fifth of the world's undiscovered resources lie in precisely this region. Reckless competition for access to the Arctic's natural resources is most undesirable, but real. It is therefore important to broaden the dialogue so that the Arctic region does not become the arena of a competitive struggle among countries and oil companies, the victims of which would, above all, be local inhabitants and the particularly sensitive Arctic ecosystem. The report states that in the Arctic region, where the effects of climate change are especially visible, drilling projects will increase over time. I therefore believe that it is right and particularly important to note that an environmental impact assessment ...

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Madam President, I think it is good that the European Union is developing policies and strategies for broad regions such as the Baltic, the Danube and my own region, the Atlantic, and today discussing the High North.

But in dealing with the High North, it is important that we are seen to be diplomatic, not didactic; cooperative, not coercive; and explorative, not exploitive. Because of the importance of the indigenous people, they must be given primacy of consideration, and there are companies and countries out there which are casting their greedy eyes on the North now because of its resources in terms of fossil fuels, fish and – probably – maritime transport possibilities. The European Union, because of its treaties and because of its *raison d'être*, is not in a position to strike the balance.

One other point I would make is this: I am a member of the Delegation for relations with Canada, and we could also establish a collegial approach with Canada and like-minded countries to ensure fair play for the High North, and particularly the indigenous people.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Madam President, the plundering of commodities, strategic interests, climate change and, not least, increasing tourism are driving this sensitive ecosystem to the brink of destruction. However, the ecosystem of the High North is relatively self-sustaining and therefore extremely sensitive. For this reason, it is important to strike

a balance between exploitation, on the one hand, and maximum protection for this sensitive system, on the other. However, this cannot be achieved without imposing restrictions on the extraction of commodities and the methods used in this extraction, as well as stricter rules for tourism and commercial shipping.

News that major mineral oil company BP and the Russian state-run enterprise Rosneft have drawn up joint plans for extracting oil and gas would not seem to point in the direction of the prudent extraction of commodities – quite the opposite in fact!

It is therefore clear that the protection of the Arctic is an issue that goes beyond individual national strategic and economic interests and must be a central concern for the EU.

Sari Essayah (PPE). – *(FI)* Madam President, I wish to thank the rapporteur, Mr Gahler, and the shadow rapporteurs, for an excellent, diverse report, which raises various issues in a balanced way. These include the Arctic region's potential, its vast natural resources, the raw materials and energy resources, and the new traffic lanes and tourism, but also, at the same time, the vulnerability of the delicate Arctic environment, and the rights of its indigenous peoples. In the north, we need to behave very responsibly indeed, and to have a good Arctic strategy.

I also agree with my fellow Finnish Members who have expressed their satisfaction with the report, in that it has positively taken account of the initiative of the University of Lapland to establish an EU Arctic Information Centre on its premises. I look forward to the Commission's report on Arctic policy, as promised by Mr Füle.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission.* – Madam President, this has indeed been an interesting debate showing how many important subjects are covered by Arctic cooperation, and how varied are the sensitivities in our society when discussing the Arctic's future. Let me address five specific issues raised in this morning's discussion.

Firstly, the Arctic Information Centre. Both the Commission communication of 2008 and the Council conclusions of 2009 ask the Commission to explore the possibility of establishing a new Arctic Information Centre. We are thoroughly examining the various possibilities in the European Union, including the centre in Rovaniemi, Finland (Lapland) and, above all, the role of this possible centre.

Secondly, the European Union is the only Arctic stakeholder to have recognised upfront that, as an industrialised entity, it is responsible, along with other industrialised areas, for the changes happening in the Arctic. The Commission communication gives priority to environmental protection, and the prominence of this point was maintained in the Council conclusions of 2009.

Thirdly, we are proud of our Sami EU citizens, and we are proud of the different provisions in the EU treaties and in the EU regional policy addressing the Sami people. Our cross-border cooperation and European instrument for democracy and human rights programmes are supporting the Sami people of north-west Russia and other indigenous peoples of the Barents region.

Fourthly, the European Union and Member States are a leading force for Arctic research in the world, and we are proud of it. This area has been mentioned in the framework programme. Altogether, through the fifth, sixth and seventh framework programmes, the European Union is investing EUR 200 million in this field. However, trying to be the

prominent and unilateral leader in overall Arctic politics and policies, while not being an Arctic coastal entity, will not be a wise policy to pursue.

Fifthly, the Commission adopted in 2010 a communication on offshore drilling, which should guide our actions across the world, including the Arctic region. It promotes a cautious approach that we will also apply in the Arctic. This is totally in line with the EU principles of protecting the Arctic and firmly asking for the highest environmental standards.

Mr President, honourable Members, the Parliament's High North report gives a comprehensive overview of the European Union's activities, responsibilities and interests in the Arctic region. It also consolidates the EU's balanced approach to the Arctic, combining its protection and its sustainable development. We are convinced that this is within our reach and that the European Union will become an unavoidable and positive reference for Arctic circumpolar cooperation.

Michael Gahler, *rapporteur.* – (DE) Madam President, I would also like to thank all the speakers. Commissioner, when I referred to a policy in relation to our neighbours in the High North, I did not wish to imply that you were engaging in a dispute over authority with Baroness Ashton. I just wanted to clarify that.

Almost all the speeches we have heard have made one thing clear: the challenge confronting us is to demonstrate through our policy that different interests and activities are reconcilable or must be made reconcilable.

I believe that this can be seen in microcosm in Norway, for example: they catch fish, they drill for oil and gas, they practise the highest environmental standards on land and sea and they develop their northernmost regions for the people who live there. If we can apply this principle to the region as a whole through cooperation with local communities, then we will become a role model for other sensitive regions. What has changed in the political reality is the fact that we do not believe that we can compel people to comply with our wishes, but that we must accept the challenge of achieving all our goals at the same time: we need a high standard in environmental protection, a clamp-down on climate change, a sustainable fisheries policy, secure shipping route development and acceptable development for local communities. If we try to work together to set these targets and then to achieve them, then we really will achieve something important in cooperation with our partners for the benefit of the region and ourselves.

Once again, I would like to thank all the shadow rapporteurs in particular. I look forward to further debate on the basis of this report. The vote should not mark the end of this issue.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place later.

5. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

6. An EU Strategy for the Black Sea (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Mr Ungureanu, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on an EU strategy for the Black Sea (2010/2087(INI)) (A7-0378/2010).

Traian Ungureanu, *rapporteur*. – Madam President, exactly three years ago, the European Parliament endorsed the Black Sea Synergy. This was the first step towards a coherent policy in one of the most sensitive areas in Europe, and it was a step in the right direction because the Black Sea is now widely analysed – and feared – as a converging space of political, strategic and security hopes, strengths and ambitions.

Today, our policy in the area can be further developed. This House can play a crucial role in upgrading EU policies to a fully-fledged EU strategy. This is actually the main idea in the report I initiated with the support of my colleagues from the Foreign Affairs Committee and Parliament as a whole.

But why a new report on the Black Sea and why an EU strategy for the Black Sea? Some people would say that the Black Sea is a small sea. Indeed it is, but if we exchange this map for a strategy map, the Black Sea becomes huge. There is also another factor: the Black Sea is getting blacker and blacker.

Since the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the Black Sea is now partially an internal EU sea. However, developments in the region are often unpredictable: tensions accumulate and misunderstandings abound. A summary analysis of the Black Sea region leads to the conclusion that the negative challenges in this area persist or are, indeed, gaining in intensity. The Georgia-Russia war of 2008, the unsolved and so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts, and the worrying deterioration of democratic rule in Ukraine and Russia are all very serious developments and vivid examples of the security risks in the area.

If we examine the current results of EU involvement in the region, they seem at least mixed. The EU policy approach towards the Black Sea lacks mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and follow-up. The Black Sea region is not visible enough in debates in Brussels, and EU funding for the region is fragmented and complicated.

While building upon the merits of the Black Sea Synergy which we adopted three years ago, a new EU strategy for the Black Sea should put in place a stronger policy and concrete tools. Let me mention just two of the recommendations in the report. The first concerns adequate resources: if the EU wants to play a key role in the Black Sea region, it needs to devote adequate resources, both financial and human. The creation of a separate budget line in the EU budget is vital. The second recommendation is for the elaboration of an EU action plan with clear objectives and tasks, including regular ministerial-level meetings of the relevant countries.

The EU strategy for the Black Sea should not underestimate, or overestimate, any state in the area. The principles of inclusiveness and regional ownership should be reflected in an important role for Turkey and Russia, but also for all the regional partners, in the success of regional cooperation.

To conclude, I should like to thank all my colleagues for their very positive contributions to the final version of this report. I think we all agree that this House expects the Commission and the Council to turn this report into reality. The strategic and beneficial involvement of the EU in the Black Sea region should become a fact.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I am very glad that the Black Sea region is high on the agenda of the European Parliament. This region is important for the European Union and we need to focus on it to reflect its extreme sensitivity for us.

I want to thank and congratulate the rapporteur for the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mr Traian Ungureanu, on an excellent and very substantive report. The report and its recommendations are interesting and innovative on the many issues.

Since the latest enlargement, the Black Sea is also an EU sea. We have responsibilities towards it, just as we do to all other basin regions that border us. We have to tackle this new responsibility resolutely.

As part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, we already have an initiative targeting this region: the Black Sea Synergy. However, we must admit that its implementation has proved much more difficult than we had thought. Not everything we want to do is being welcomed with enthusiasm by everybody in the region.

Precisely for these reasons, Parliament has chosen an approach based on regional ownership and fostering dialogue. I believe that this is now the right approach for us to pursue, but these commitments can only be credible if and when they bring concrete improvements to the peoples in the region.

Thus, the report on developing a new European Union strategy for the Black Sea represents our commitment to the region and to our Member States who belong to this area by giving them our full support in facing the challenges linked to their specific geographic situation.

We understand that a strategy for the Black Sea region should not be interpreted as a replacement for existing efforts, particularly the Black Sea Synergy. It should rather be a comprehensive framework where guidance can be found for all European Union activities in the region.

The Black Sea strategy can provide an ideal occasion to review our interests in the region, including strategic, political and economic interests, and to discuss how best they can be achieved. Parliament has identified the appropriate fields in which the strategy should be developed, like governance, security and energy, transport, environment, trade, local economic development and social and human development.

Developing this strategy can also provide the opportunity to add a maritime dimension to ongoing activities in the region. The Commission is currently developing a comprehensive package that will address maritime policy initiatives, management of natural resources and the fight against illegal fishing activities.

We can draw on our know-how from other strategies, such as the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the EU Danube strategy. Indeed, the Danube strategy will require obvious interactions with the Black Sea. However, we are aware that each European basin region is different. Accordingly, we need to ensure that all future EU strategies should be adapted to their own sectoral characteristics, economic and social development, environment and energy, infrastructure and natural resources.

The report on developing an EU strategy for the Black Sea region offers an overview of the future challenges for the region, but it will also be relevant for establishing solid channels with the state partners in the region to ensure its smooth and effective implementation. We need to use this opportunity to consult extensively with all stakeholders, starting with our partners in the regions and with the involvement of Parliament.

Again, this report is welcome and we are keen to draw on its recommendations. The External Action Service and the relevant Commission services will be committing their efforts to prepare a Black Sea strategy for which we will seek your and the Council's support.

Metin Kazak, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on International Trade.* – (BG) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to congratulate Mr Ungureanu and, as rapporteur for the Committee on International Trade, I am pleased that some of our proposals have been included in the main text of the report.

I am pleased that, as has already been mentioned, after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the Black Sea, to put it figuratively, became a 'European' sea and requires an overall European strategy involving quite a lot of administrative and financial resources, as well as good coordination and accountability.

A key task is to incorporate a project approach into the new strategy. Special attention has to be paid to areas of common interest, such as the environment, energy, transport and infrastructure, which are of decisive importance to the region's sustainable development.

Intensive cooperation at parliamentary level is also necessary, for example, with organisations such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the WTO, and with the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank. Finally, I also believe that we should consider other regional initiatives, but not allow the strategy to drown in them.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy.* – (RO) Madam President, the Committee on Industry, Research and Industry supports full market and regulatory integration on the basis of EU energy legislation and encourages the participation of countries in the wider Black Sea region in the Energy Community Treaty, as well as EU, EIB and EBRD assistance for the modernisation of the energy infrastructure in this region.

We stress the European added value and importance of the Southern Gas Corridor as a means of enhancing the European Union's supply security. Projects such as the Nabucco pipeline, a priority project for the European Union, along with the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, the Pan-European Oil Pipeline, the Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector, or the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector, emphasise both the importance of the EU's commitments in the Black Sea region and the further need to step up cooperation between the countries in the region. We stress the importance of establishing a regional research and education network in the wider Black Sea region and its link to GEANT, and call on the Commission to continue to support research projects in the region.

I am ending, Madam President, with a call to the Commission to devise a European Union strategy for the region, along with an action plan. We stress the need to establish a link between this and the European Union's Danube strategy.

Victor Boştinaru, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development.* – Madam President, Commissioner, the importance of the Black Sea region for the EU from the transport, energy, stability, security and environmental point of view is evident. It is for this reason that the EU strategy for this region will certainly have a very positive impact on the area and on the EU as a whole.

The Committee on Regional Development believes this strategy can bring growth and sustainable development for the region. But also it is of the opinion that for full effectiveness, it is necessary to involve all the states of the region, no matter whether they are Member States or not. This strategy needs actions to be coordinated – but how could this coordination exist without the proper involvement of all countries? Coordination is certainly

needed with the Danube strategy, which is soon supposed to become a major priority of the Hungarian Presidency.

The use of an integrated approach and cross-border cooperation between the regions should be promoted in all fields of the strategy but, in particular, those of transport, energy and the environment.

Elmar Brok, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the rapporteur for the excellent work he has done, bringing many ideas together in a comprehensive form, something that will help us in our future efforts.

We must understand that this cooperation in the Black Sea region should not be confused with the Eastern Partnership or with our strategic relations with Turkey and Russia. These are different matters and this cooperation does not replace them. On the other hand, I find hugely exciting that it is possible to bring these divergent groups together on certain issues in order to produce a coherent policy that is in our own interests, as well as helping the relevant countries too. Such cooperation may possibly help to bring together conflicting political and economic interests, so that future disputes will be less dramatic and dangerous and so that, for example, our work in the Eastern Partnership is not construed as being directed against any particular individual, but rather that everything is understood to be complementary. However, when it comes to a European perspective, this cooperative stance should not preclude us from expecting that the Eastern Partnership with these countries will produce different results from development strategies with Russia, for example. We must be permitted to make such distinctions and the Commissioner is no doubt well aware that this should be the case. However, for this reason, Black Sea cooperation is in the interest of the European Union, in the interest of Russia, in the interest of Turkey and in the interest of the remaining countries in this region – most of whom are members of the Eastern Partnership. I could imagine that this will contribute significantly to the economic and political stability of Europe and hope that we can work closely with the Commissioner in order to drive this forward.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Madam President, the Black Sea is a gate to and from Europe, and therefore it should be addressed as such. It is not a far distant place of little relevance which occasionally comes to our attention.

The truth is that the area has already put – and will continue to put – items on our agenda, be it through the interruption of gas transit as in 2006 and 2008, or the Georgian war in 2008. However, in spite of the evidence and its recognised importance, the Black Sea area still does not enjoy the attention it deserves from the EU – an EU which was, in a way, compelled to address these problems once Bulgaria and Romania had become members in 2007.

The Black Sea Synergy, elaborated not long after the admission of those two countries, appears to have been, in retrospect, a hastily put together document designed to cover a ‘blank spot’ or ‘black hole’ – depending on your preference – which the EU had to deal with almost overnight. The fact that nothing of importance has happened since the first review of the initiative in 2008 – and we are not very far advanced in its implementation as mentioned in the report – is indicative of that.

To my mind, there are two main reasons for this. First, there is an apparent disinterest and unwillingness on the part of EU Members to address the area decisively. Moreover, now that money is short, there is even less willingness to do so than before.

Secondly, the initial assumption on which the synergy was based, namely, that the area should become a coherent and cooperative region in order to qualify for EU attention and material support, has ignored the simple truth that just 20 years ago, the area looked completely different. To expect an area so complex and different to become coherent and get an individual identity in such a short time is either unrealistic or – I hate to say – ill-intended. Perhaps, in the context of a revisiting of the Eastern Partnership, things would improve.

Ivo Vajgl, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (SL) Madam President, the report which my fellow Member, Mr Ungureanu, has prepared in such a committed way and in a manner that paves the way for cooperation, for which I thank him, brings our attention back to a region characterised by diversity. The diversity of political systems, cultural traditions, religions, statuses and ambitions in terms of moving closer to the European Union, the level of economic development, the availability of natural resources and, of course, the new situation which has arisen because, today, three Member States of the European Union form part of the region that we are discussing.

For us, the Black Sea region is particularly interesting because of its geostrategic position, which brings with it either added value or serious risks to our security interests. In this context, I emphasise, in particular, energy security and ensuring a sustainable energy supply for the European Union, infrastructure and opportunities for us to have an influence in the resolution of conflicts and unresolved issues in the region, as well as developing partnerships with Russia and Turkey. All of this can be achieved with a deeper engagement of the countries in the region and with the participation of all Member States of the European Union and other organisations and networks present in the region, including networks of civil society organisations; it is precisely they that require our special attention and recognition.

We do not need new institutions for any of this; what we need to do is ensure regular funding and greater political engagement. Commissioner, I believe that you will be able to put this report to good use and I look forward to working with you.

Werner Schulz, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, if the Black Sea region is to develop into an area of stability, security, democracy and prosperity and if these opportunities and challenges are to be fulfilled, we need an all-embracing strategy. This resolution pursues that objective and is therefore supported by my group. This is also because a number of our proposals have been included, for example, dealing with the unresolved conflicts in the region, improving cooperation in civil society, support for people-to-people projects and the promotion of small projects in the context of cross-border cooperation.

We also want to see a sustainable energy policy, greater energy efficiency and the establishment of academic and student networks. However, what I would criticise is the lack of a coherent position in relation to the question of the energy infrastructure in the region – I would mention Nabucco and South Stream in this context. I fail to understand why our call for stricter monitoring of oil rigs in the Black Sea has been rejected. This is absolutely essential following the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. It is for this reason that we are presenting this amendment once again today.

Paweł Robert Kowal, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, I think the document which has been drafted deserves to be endorsed, so on behalf of my group, I endorse it. I would like to emphasise that the Black Sea Synergy needs rethinking, today. Noble intentions have not always translated into effective use of the Synergy, and it is very good that the rapporteur stresses this. Therefore, I think the most important task today for Mr Füle is to try to sort out our initiatives in this part of Europe and show that our priority is Neighbourhood Policy, and that other issues should be given second place in this context. I think this way of thinking guarantees that the Black Sea Synergy will be effective in the future, especially in the field of energy. The Synergy could also be a good instrument, for example, if we are talking about supporting Georgia in the democratic and economic transformations it has been going through in recent years. However, the first and essential step, today, is to organise initiatives in this part of Europe, so that we can not only be proud of them, but that they will really be effective in achieving some specific objectives.

David Campbell Bannerman, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Madam President, in discussing the Black Sea area, one word leaps to mind, and that is ‘caution’. All must tread carefully here.

The Black Sea area is Russia’s backyard. It has its fleet anchored in the Crimea at Sebastopol, close to the bloody battlefields of the Crimean War. We have seen the unfortunate conflict in Georgia, where there was fault on both sides. Had Georgia been in NATO, the consequences could have been disastrous. Whilst I support Georgian independence, it is unwise to goad the Russian bear in its own lair.

Then there is Turkey which the EU is playing with by offering membership despite the reality that members such as France will veto an application. Turkey has just 4% of its landmass within Europe. It should not be in the EU. There are real dangers in leading Turkey on. Disappointment could drive Turkey into the hands of Islamic extremists.

Finally, underlying all of this is the fact that the Black Sea is the hub for vital Caspian oil and gas. Tread carefully indeed.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Madam President, I would like to join the majority of the opinions expressed in this House and congratulate the rapporteur on what he has achieved with his report. *Pontus Euxinus*, as the Black Sea was called in antiquity, has always been of a major geostrategic and economic significance for Europe. It still has this significance in our times.

That is why it is very important for this strategy to be translated into real action, because we are having a debate again, and I remember us having a similar debate quite recently. That is why I want to basically draw a line under what has been said by the members of the socialist group, and to lend my particular support for the point that envisages a separate budgetary item to implement the strategy.

So I call upon the Commission to act. It is only with adequate funding that we will be able to translate the words spoken in this House today into action that has an impact on European citizens.

Iuliu Winkler (PPE). – Madam President, I should like to start by congratulating Mr Ungureanu on his initiative in carrying out the report on the Black Sea. I also welcome the endorsement of several of the previous speakers, my distinguished colleagues, who have committed themselves to promoting a new European vision for the Black Sea region.

The Black Sea has indeed become a partially internal sea of the European Union. Its geostrategic importance can hardly be overstated, considering the regional stability, the democratisation processes, and the related energy security, economic and commercial issues. I strongly believe that we, the EU, should benefit from the potential of the Black Sea region and not others.

To achieve this goal, the European Union has to rely more on its Member States belonging to the region, has to give up any anchorage in the past and has to show more dynamism, leadership and vision. Without touching on the issues related to the enlargement process, I would like to address a message to all the Black Sea sceptics. Any slowdown in the EU integration process of the region will have a throwback effect on the democratic evolution of the area. The risk is medium and long-term instability, whose implications would be hard to evaluate, and even harder to manage, for the European Union.

In conclusion, the EU needs its internal Black Sea and we need an integrated strategy for this region. The Black Sea strategy should be drafted by the Commission, relying on the recommendations reached by our rapporteur. Today, this House should offer its wholehearted support for the strategy.

Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, we are debating a very important report today on a particular area close to the European Union: the Black Sea. The area combines EU Member States and countries which are important to regional cooperation. We therefore have a common need to safeguard the existence of an area of peace, democracy, security and stability around the Black Sea.

We have a stable framework for cooperation through the Black Sea Synergy, which was put in motion some time ago, although not with tangible results. Its successful implementation through action by all participating countries will further strengthen our relations on the basis of common values. It needs to complement the established European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership.

Stability and security around the Black Sea have a direct impact on Europe. Consequently, the European Union shares responsibility for supporting the peaceful resolution of conflict and building confidence. This area is important to the Union, especially by reason of its energy and transport links. Strengthening democracy and a strong rule of law system will facilitate trade, investments and the free movement of people.

I absolutely endorse the view that a special line should be set up in the budget for the Black Sea Synergy. This will provide effective help in modernising the area. It is up to us to use our policies to bring these countries even closer to Europe, for the mutual benefit of all.

Adina-Ioana Vălean (ALDE). – Madam President, since 2007, we have acknowledged the importance of the Black Sea region, yet the impact of our approach has been modest to say the least: no concrete projects, no concrete results. We need a realistic and financially sound action plan with clear objectives, priority actions and benchmarks, and a better division of tasks and coordination with the Eastern Partnership and the Danube strategy.

We need to launch the energy and transport partnership alongside the environment partnership. Only through such a project-based approach, focused on small-scale specific projects, can we overcome the issue of the very diverse and complex interests in the region. We need to get past our fragmented approach in terms of finance as well. So far, we have had various financial instruments and little visibility. That is why we should make the Black Sea joint operational programme our central instrument for implementing the Black Sea

strategy, using it as seed money to attract institutions ready to invest in the region and, hence, promote cooperation.

Oldřich Vlasák (ECR). – (CS) Madam President, the slow tempo of project implementation, the non-existence of action plans and assessment reports, the absence of high-level meetings, the risk of duplicity with the Eastern Partnership and many other problems indicate that the decision for Member States to take a leading role in implementing the Black Sea strategy was ill-advised. It appears that the European Commission should play a more significant role as the secretariat and facilitator of this strategy for the Black Sea.

I also firmly believe that this strategy, just like the other macro-region strategies, should remain neutral in budgetary, institutional and legislative terms; in other words, that it should not involve the expenditure of further additional resources, the establishment of new institutions or the drafting of new legislation.

There is no need for new operational programmes and specific budgetary items, but there is a need to focus on implementing specific projects, in which the states affected will have a real interest.

Georgios Koumoutsakos (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, it is merely a formality nowadays to emphasise that the Black Sea is an area of strategic importance to the European Union. How could it be otherwise, now that, following the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, it is practically an internal sea within the European Union? Energy, security, stability and, of course, democracy are sectors of prime importance to us in this area.

Since 2007, when we started our policy in this area, which is crucial on several counts, we have made some progress and achieved some successes. However, unfortunately, we have also seen delays and fragmented approaches and periods of inertia. It is unfortunate that no ministerial meeting on this policy has been organised since 2008. This situation falls well below our initial ambitions and, given the geostrategic, geopolitical and economic importance of the area, we only have one choice: to strengthen our policy and action on the Black Sea.

I therefore unreservedly support the proposal by the rapporteur, Mr Ungureanu, to upgrade European policy on the Black Sea to an integrated strategy supported by a separate budget line. Within this framework, I wish, as a member of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, to highlight the importance of these two sectors, which must be constituent components of a European strategy for the Black Sea.

Finally, there is no need to emphasise that the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy could also make an essential contribution to uniform, viable development of the Black Sea area. This needs to be done now. However, enlargement is another matter and requires a great deal of careful study.

Evgeni Kirilov (S&D). – Madam President, with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the Black Sea region became an EU neighbouring region. It is a strategic bridge connecting Europe with the Caspian Sea and Central Asia. Its geopolitical and economic importance for the EU is constantly increasing in terms of security, stability and energy. The Union should therefore step up its presence, develop active policies and find lasting solutions to the existing problems in the region.

It is not only the littoral countries that show a big interest in multilateral regional cooperation – which is crucial for solving urgent issues of regional and European importance such as ‘frozen’ conflicts, trafficking and other security-related issues.

What is currently needed is a focus on several issues of concern that are of pragmatic interest to all the littoral states. One such issue is maritime security. In recent years, there has been an increase in accidents involving loss of human life and environmental damage in the Black Sea. The EU should reduce the risk of civil accidents by providing assistance to search-and-rescue operations within the framework of the European integrated maritime policy. We expect to vote soon on the report by our colleague, Iliana Malinova Iotova, which deals for the first time with EU fisheries policy in the Black Sea. This could also offer a good basis for multilateral cooperation in the region.

EU support is also desirable for ongoing projects like the Black Sea Ring Highway, Pan-European Transport Corridors 8 and 9, and the transport connections between the Black Sea ports.

I would like to thank the rapporteur for supporting my amendments and for his excellent oral contribution.

Marek Siwiec (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, when we are talking about the Black Sea region, it needs to be said that there is no place like it around the European Union where there are such extreme differences, so many intense conflicts – including bloody conflicts – and so many conflicting interests. So we should not delude ourselves that by formulating any kind of policy, we will be able to resolve matters which other policies cannot resolve. This is not a radio request show, and we cannot solve energy problems when Russia does not want the pipeline but we do want it. We cannot resolve regional conflicts, either. In fact, it is a very limited policy, but for all that, it is worth applying it.

Since we are talking about synergy in relation to Black Sea policy, we should bear in mind that synergy means a certain added value. I would like to ask, for example, why the European Parliament is not working with organisations which exist in the region, such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC). They want to work with us. The European Parliament thinks it is too big and too important, and is not seeking this cooperation. I propose we begin this cooperation and act together with others.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) Madam President, the Black Sea region is strategically important to the European Union. However, we note the lack of a structured approach to this region. No action plan has been drawn up for the Black Sea Synergy and funding is provided via several uncoordinated instruments. This makes it imperative to devise an EU Black Sea strategy, with the same level of priority as the European Union’s other regional strategies and focused on three main areas: economic, social and human development; energy, transport and environment; security and good governance.

Certain key projects for the European economy, such as the Nabucco pipeline, which would allow greater energy independence, or the development of the Black Sea ports, require immediate impetus, which can only be achieved on the back of a common strategy.

Niki Tzavela (EFD). – (EL) Madam President, the Black Sea is very important to the energy security of Europe. Commissioner, there is the major issue of the Nabucco pipeline, on which the energy security of Europe depends in large measure. However, as far as the supplier of this large pipeline is concerned, the information is very unclear. Yesterday, the President of the Commission, Mr Barroso, told us that he had been in Azerbaijan and

Turkmenistan and that discussions had gone very well. What does that mean? At some point, we need to set a time limit. When will we know whether or not the Nabucco pipeline is viable, so that we do not waste energy and can look for alternatives? The issue of the Nabucco pipeline, which is one of the core issues in terms of Europe's energy security, is extremely important and needs to be clarified. Do we have a supplier or not?

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) Madam President, I would like to begin by congratulating the rapporteur, Mr Ungureanu, for the particularly fine job he has done on this report, which is extremely important both from a geopolitical and economic perspective. The region offers considerable potential for energy production and provision and must have greater attention focused on it, particularly with a view to ensuring the Union's energy security.

Given that, up until now, the actions taken by the EU have not been clarified sufficiently and the Black Sea Synergy has not achieved its expected potential, I sincerely hope that the European External Action Service will have available the human and material resources required to complete the implementation of the three partnerships: environment, transport and energy. I think that the European Union should not ignore this region. On the contrary, it must make its presence felt through consistent, long-term actions which will allow development opportunities to be utilised.

Csanád Szegedi (NI). – (HU) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, as a Hungarian Member, I add my thoughts to the strategy for the Black Sea because I seem to notice two goals in the report which are identical with the main priorities of the Hungarian Presidency.

The first one is the fact that the report makes a commitment to regional development between the European Union and this region. For us Hungarian Members, this is particularly important with a view to support for the Danube strategy, as any request for support for the Danube strategy can only be credible if we remain open to supporting other strategies as well.

The second one is energy security itself. Other than its intention to ensure peace and stability in the region, perhaps the most important objective of the strategy for the Black Sea in the field of energy security is to ensure energy security itself, and as was said yesterday, energy security is the other main priority of the Hungarian Presidency, and is thus in all our interests.

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE). – (NL) Madam President, the Black Sea is on our doorstep and, when looked at from the energy perspective, it is also genuinely European. As shadow rapporteur of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) for the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and as coordinator for regional policy, I would like to endorse that view once again. The Black Sea offers a great opportunity. What is key in this respect is cooperation. We have just talked about the investments around Nabucco; these things can work only with stable relations. Yesterday, Mr Barroso reported the results achieved in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In brief, the added value of such strategies is beyond dispute; that is very clear and, incidentally, Mr Brok has highlighted that.

As far as I am concerned, diversifying our energy flow would be paramount as part of a much broader framework. I also wish to thank rapporteur Ungureanu for this compelling and necessary report.

Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D). – (RO) Madam President, the Black Sea is important to the European Union in terms not only of its strategic location, but also of the economic opportunities available and the conditions for stronger regional development. The benefits of the strategy for this region derive from its contribution to diversifying economic activities between the countries bordering the sea, increasing education and research cooperation, as well as strengthening cooperation in the region to provide important protection for the natural resources.

I think that the European Union must encourage the countries in the Black Sea region to make sufficient use of the natural environmental resources, ensure the region's sustainable development, improve the quality of life in this region and establish local and regional partnerships.

Ștefan Füle, *Member of the Commission.* – Madam President, at this point, I shall make just three remarks. The first I have expressed already at the beginning of our debate, which is appreciation for this timely report on the Black Sea region.

Second, let me welcome the clear evidence, as shown in our debate, of the importance you attribute to this special region, which is shared by the External Action Service and the Commission.

My third remark is that I am looking forward to cooperation with the House on the Black Sea strategy and its subsequent implementation.

Traian Ungureanu, *rapporteur.* – Madam President, I am very lucky I can be short, not only because of the noise, but also because I was lucky enough to be supported on both sides, largely speaking, of this House. I think that, as Mr Brok stressed in his brilliant remarks, the report which we are preparing to vote on today is a very good example of cross-party cooperation in this House; I have to give special thanks to Mr Pașcu, who proved to be a very active and honest supporter of this report.

I do not want to bring in other names, as this would be unjust because everybody had something important to say regarding this report: regarding the uniqueness of the Black Sea space, regarding its fragility as well and regarding the need to exercise caution when we formulate policy in the Black Sea area.

Of course, it is vital to remark on the necessity of the Nabucco project and its pan-European importance. I would also like to thank Commissioner Füle for his remarks, especially for mentioning the maritime dimension, which the Commission is shaping right now and, of course, for making the necessary link between the Black Sea strategy and the Danube strategy.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place in a few moments.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) I would first of all like to congratulate my colleague, Traian Ungureanu, for drafting this report, which is especially important to Romania. My country is the most active EU Member State in promoting the Black Sea's strategic importance and the need for the Union to increase its role in this region. The region's importance has been outlined in several instruments supporting the EU's eastern neighbours. However, the Black Sea Synergy has produced limited results. I think that the EU's priorities

must be aimed at consolidating a stable, democratic region. Unresolved conflicts have become the sore point in the Black Sea region. They can reignite at any time, posing a threat to regional security. The Black Sea is also of particular importance to EU energy security. The European Commission must continue to focus, in particular, on planned energy projects in this region.

Corina Crețu (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) The confused objectives and duplication of forms of cooperation are at risk of depriving the EU's Black Sea strategy of any substance. The situation is unlikely to improve due to the differences in status of the countries involved in relation to the European Union, to the frequently differing interests of the actors involved in this cooperation and due to a lack of vision, which is also evident in the Ungureanu report. If we want to speed up the process of settling the unresolved conflicts in the region, we need to start from the observation that this action has been greatly delayed by sponsors of the various plans vying with each other, thereby holding the process up for more than 15 years. Indeed, this competition betrays their varying interests, most often linked, whether explicitly or implicitly, to control over the transport routes in the region. I believe that a clearer picture will emerge only when it is patently obvious what is going to happen with Turkey's accession to the EU and what status Russia will have in relation to the Union. It is only when these matters have been clarified that the unresolved conflicts will be settled and long-term stability established in the region.

András Gyürk (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) The strategy for the Black Sea is expected to play an increasingly important part in the future of the European Union. This is illustrated quite well by the joint declaration signed by the European Commission and Azerbaijan last week, in which Azerbaijan made a written commitment to making a large quantity of gas sources available to Europe. I am pleased to note that the European Commission is finally taking concrete steps to promote the Nabucco project, because ensuring access to the sources of gas located in the Caspian region should be considered a special priority. Meanwhile, however, we must not forget about the transportation of gas to Europe, which can only be realised through the countries of the Black Sea.

The intensification of dialogue between the EU and the countries of the Black Sea could represent a major advancement in guaranteeing the security of European energy supply as the construction of the Nabucco pipeline will also provide Member States currently characterised by a very poor diversity of resources with access to new sources of gas. However, the establishment of the pipelines will also require active contribution on the part of the countries involved. A transparent, non-discriminatory transport framework and a business environment that supports investments are not only important for the supply security of EU Member States, but are also crucial for the stability and prosperity of the region. In my opinion, the Black Sea region can only benefit from the construction of Nabucco: the pipeline will provide a predictable source of income for countries in the region, and will, at the same time, provide them with direct access to the world's largest gas market.

Danuta Jazłowiecka (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) The author of the report under discussion clearly indicates that what is called the Black Sea Synergy, which was adopted in 2007, has not completely fulfilled the hopes which were placed in it. The enlargement of the Union with Bulgaria and Romania meant that this region found itself at the centre of our attention. After the situation in Central and Eastern Europe had stabilised, it seemed the time had come for the Union to concentrate on the Black Sea region. However, the global economic crisis made this subject literally disappear from the European agenda. We must not forget

that the Union is not only the Baltic or the Mediterranean basin. Of course, current events in Tunisia show that these regions, too, require our attention. However, we must start to realise that the Black Sea region is slowly becoming pivotal from the European point of view. It is there that the solution to our energy problems is to be found. It is there that communication routes are located which are important to our economy. It is there that sources of instability, too, are to be found, which may, for us, represent a significant danger. For all these reasons, it is necessary to agree with the rapporteur that the time has come to develop a comprehensive EU policy for the Black Sea region. What is more, it seems that changes brought in by the Treaty of Lisbon may contribute to the effective introduction of such a plan. Furthermore, the establishment of a suitable unit in the European External Action Service could solve most of the imperfections of the current Black Sea Synergy.

Jaromír Kohlíček (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (CS) The European Union strategy for the Black Sea region resembles a yeti. Everyone talks about it, but no one has seen it. This belief of mine is strengthened by some of the contradictions I can see right at the beginning of the resolution. First, there is the definition of the Black Sea region. It is rather curious that Azerbaijan, a country on the Caspian Sea, is included, while Macedonia is not, although its two closest neighbours, Bulgaria and Greece, are included in the Black Sea region, ‘in accordance with the European Commission definition’. I had no idea that Greece stretches all the way to the shores of the Black Sea. The 13 areas of cooperation where greater EU involvement is anticipated in the region comprise a very extensive list. It seems that the Commission did not previously appreciate the importance of this region. Ultimately, given that EUR 1.5 million was taken from a pilot project on the environment and the development of the region in the spring of this year and redirected to a project on bananas in the ACP countries, I would have to query the information on which the Commission based such a decision. It is curious that the author ‘failed to notice’ the South Stream gas pipeline, yet mentions the controversial and not fully funded Nabucco project. I would like to emphasise that the opportunity to enter into partnership relationships with various EU regions will be very important for the further development of the region, excluding the area mentioned before. The conclusions from the last debate on suspending visas with Ukraine are missing.

Iosif Matula (PPE), in writing. – (RO) We are debating today a project which is important to the European Union’s future from several perspectives. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU has brought added value with the provision of access to the Black Sea, a region which also brings together countries neighbouring the Union, including strategic partners. Drawing up a common Black Sea strategy will enable us to make significant progress towards creating an area of stability, security, democracy and prosperity. In this context, we can regard the common, integrated initiatives adopted by the countries in the region as a preliminary step towards the reunification of our continent.

As both a Romanian and a member of the Committee on Regional Development, I support the link being made between the future Black Sea strategy and the Danube strategy, recently launched by the European Commission. I think that the EU needs to be involved more in the Black Sea region and to cooperate with third countries, as our regions are interlinked territorially and economically. This will enable us to ensure greater energy security for the future, by implementing infrastructure projects such as the Southern Corridor or liquefied gas terminals and diversifying supply routes and sources.

Furthermore, we must give due importance to coordinating the financial instruments available for the Black Sea region, develop and modernise its ports, and reduce pollution in this area.

Zbigniew Ziobro (ECR), in writing. – (PL) The Black Sea Synergy is a further example of a missed opportunity in the area of relations with regions which are geopolitically and strategically important for its future. When the strategy was adopted, construction of energy interconnections between the Black Sea countries and the European Union was set as a priority. The main investment which will enable achievement of this objective is the Nabucco gas pipeline. Unfortunately, we have, for a long time, been seeing a lack of determination from Brussels on this. Neighbouring countries which are interested in the construction of the pipeline are also saying so. For a year now, Azerbaijan has been signalling the need for action from the Union in order to contract gas from Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, because without their involvement, construction of the pipeline will not be financially worthwhile. Meanwhile, a competing project which by-passes the Caucasus countries – the Russian South Stream pipeline – is being given tacit consent for its construction. We must not work like this. The provisions of the energy report are insufficient. They should be made more specific by the addition of information about the means earmarked for investments of strategic significance for the future of the EU.

(The sitting was suspended for a few moments)

IN THE CHAIR: GIANNI PITTELLA

Vice-President

7. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

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

Mrs Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė has asked to table a procedural motion.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE). – (LT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this year, 13 January marks the 20th anniversary of an event which brought down the walls of the Soviet empire. In 1991 in Lithuania, an unarmed crowd of several thousand people resisted the aggression of the Soviet army and defended freedom and independence. The bloody events of the night of 13 January stunned Europe and the whole world. Countries, international organisations and individuals reacted to the violence of the occupying forces, sending messages of support to Vilnius. On behalf of all the people of Lithuania, I would like to thank the European Parliament for the resolution adopted on 24 January 1991, supporting the Baltic States, and condemning Soviet aggression. We thank the countries you represent which did not desert us. As a symbol of our thanks, you will find a commemorative publication in your boxes, in memory of those events. So that such a tragic story is never repeated, we must ...

President. – Thank you, Mrs Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė. I would ask you to stop speaking now, because we allowed you the floor even though it was not a procedural motion that you were tabling. I did not want to interrupt you out of politeness and because you were making some valid points. Thank you.

7.1. EU-Libya Framework Agreement (A7-0368/2010, Ana Gomes) (vote)

7.2. Situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion (B7-0039/2011) (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 14:

Elmar Brok (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, with the agreement of the other groups, we wish to make a clarification: It is not our wish to change the EEAS system, but rather to extend the capacities. Accordingly, the wording we have chosen is more precise and we would ask our fellow Members to accept this. We have also used the correct official title for the European External Action Service.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

7.3. Situation in Belarus (B7-0044/2011) (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 2:

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – Mr President, we suggest one important and short addition to paragraph 2: ‘is particularly concerned about the health of Mikalay Statkevich, who has been on hunger strike for the last 31 days’.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on paragraph 3:

Jacek Protasiewicz (PPE). – Mr President, this is a very similar amendment to the one by Justas Paleckis. Since the resolution is not only a political statement by Parliament, but also offers moral support for those who are jailed, we would like to propose the inclusion in our resolution of the names of four former presidential candidates who are still in the custody of the KGB.

They are Vladimir Nekliayev, Andrei Sannikov, Nikolai Statkevich and Alexei Mikhalevich, as well as two leaders of the democratic opposition parties, Pavel Severinets, co-chairman of the Belarusian Christian Democrats, and Anatoly Lebedko, the leader of the United Civic Party. We would ask for your support, colleagues, for those six names to be included in paragraph 3.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on paragraph 9:

Vytautas Landsbergis (PPE). – Mr President, it would be appropriate to keep in mind, or maybe to include in the text, in paragraph 9, the following idea: ‘at the same time, the Commission should finance the reprinting and distribution of poetry books by Uladzimir Niakliayeu, which were recently confiscated and thrown into fires by the Belarusian authorities’. If possible, please do not oppose this.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on paragraph 13:

Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE). – Mr President, we would like to move an oral amendment and to add the words ‘no later than’ after the words ‘Eastern Partnership activities’ in paragraph 13. We need this amendment because we need fast decisions concerning the

relationship with Belarus and especially concerning the decision on the Eastern Partnership and continued Belarusian participation. We would like to ask for your support.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

7.4. Report on competition policy 2009 (A7-0374/2010, Derk Jan Eppink) (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 105:

Michael Cramer (Verts/ALE) – (DE) We would propose making the following insertion in paragraph 105:

‘Calls on the Member States and the Commission, during the transitional period’.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

7.5. A sustainable EU policy for the High North (A7-0377/2010, Michael Gahler) (vote)

7.6. An EU Strategy for the Black Sea (A7-0378/2010, Traian Ungureanu) (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 13:

Adrian Severin (S&D). – Mr President, I would like to move an oral amendment to paragraph 13. After the second sentence, which reads, ‘is convinced that an institutional dialogue bringing together the EU and the BSEC could constitute a step towards creating a genuine partnership in the region’, I would suggest including the following sentence: ‘to this end, calls for a joint working group between the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Parliamentary Assembly of the BSEC to be established’. This would provide us with a proper instrument with which to put in place the general idea, which apparently is agreed. I have talked to the rapporteur, who seems to support and accept this amendment.

(The oral amendment was not accepted)

That concludes the vote

8. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

Report: Ana Gomes (A7-0368/2010)

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, thank you for the opportunity to express my views on the agreement that the EU has entered into today with Libya, with regard to which I have to say that there is one thing that is seriously lacking. It is strange to see that what is probably the most important element as far as Europeans are concerned is completely absent from this report, namely, the fact that illegal immigrants make enormous use of Libya as a transit country for entering Europe from all over Africa and from Asia, in other words, from large parts of the world. It is well-known that the EU is a magical land where the streets are flowing with riches and honey. It is therefore a huge magnet for an incredible number of people wanting to escape from the prison, poverty and misery that their own countries represent. It is also clear that the very fact that Libya,

along with other North African countries, is patently used as a transit country is an enormous challenge for us in the EU. This ought to have played a much greater role in the discussions we had with the Libyan authorities – a much greater role with regard to the requirements we are imposing to prevent this pressure on Europe's borders. It is good that we have initiated talks, but it is frustrating that the talks are not permitted to deal with what is important.

Motions for resolutions: (RC-B7-0039/2010)

Salvatore Iacolino (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic feeling still exists to one degree or another in many parts of the world today, as do hostility and ill feeling towards Christians.

The events that have taken place recently, including violent attacks against Christians living in Pakistan, Iraq, Egypt, Nigeria and Cyprus, must be condemned in the strongest terms. A mutual understanding of other people's values is the very cornerstone of religious freedom, and it must not be restricted in such a serious way. People's fundamental freedoms must therefore be safeguarded, whether they are Christian or of other faiths.

At the same time, the European Union cannot and must not waste substantial resources on promoting other religions, particularly at this time of economic crisis. The Commission has spent an incredible EUR 4 million on promoting Islam. These funds could probably have been used for other important purposes.

Antonello Antinoro (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that what we have approved today is fundamental. Religious freedom is the mother of all freedoms. It is one of our fundamental, inalienable human rights and is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

These rights include freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. However, the massacres of recent months that have claimed victims from among the Christian minorities are the culmination of an offensive that is being conducted against Christians in many parts of the world with a systematic and indiscriminate degree of violence.

Unfortunately, as these events show, the right to religious freedom is today being called into question. This is creating intolerance, which is often encouraged and manipulated for political and financial ends. What is most striking in this current climate is the fact that the institutions are saying nothing. Any quiet protests are easily silenced.

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, I share the concerns and views expressed by previous speakers. However, there is one particular aspect that has, in fact, been given far too little attention in this report. This is paragraph 7, which concerns the condemnation of the way in which the Turkish authorities are behaving in Northern Cyprus, which, according to all international rules, is unlawfully occupied by Turkey – by Turkish troops – and therefore by a country that is both formally and, in reality, negotiating its accession to the EU.

We are seeing how the Greek-Cypriot inhabitants who want to return to their churches, monasteries and sacred buildings in Northern Cyprus are being hampered when they want to come back, how they are being prevented from entering and simply restoring their

churches and how they are being prevented from coming back and reclaiming the property that is rightfully theirs.

What we are actually witnessing in Northern Cyprus is the violent discrimination against, and suppression of, Christians, with the direct support of an EU candidate country, namely Turkey. That is unacceptable, and the European Parliament should therefore act in a way that is consistent with paragraph 7 and recommend that the negotiations with Turkey be stopped, at least until there is order in Northern Cyprus.

Marek Józef Gróbarczyk (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, in view of its roots, Europe has a particular obligation to protect all Christians throughout the world. This resolution is, of course, an expression of that obligation. Naturally, I endorsed it. However, Europe is also under an obligation to take steps which will, in future, protect all Christians throughout the world and not allow similar tragedies to occur again.

Adam Bielan (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, recently, in several countries of the world, chiefly in countries where there is a very large Muslim majority, we have been seeing brutal acts of persecution of Christian minorities. We cannot stand idly by in the face of such events. The issue of religious freedom, as well as other civil liberties, continues to be a priority of the European Parliament's work. This is why I fully endorse the statement made by the President of the European Parliament, Mr Buzek, in which he condemns these crimes. I appeal, too, to the European Union to take all available diplomatic steps in order to secure religious liberties for minorities, particularly in countries whose citizens violate these rights. In the report on human rights in 2009 which was adopted recently, we emphasised the need for the Union to play an active role in efforts to improve human rights and democracy around the world. We called for the appointment of a special EU representative on human rights. Today's resolution is the perfect starting point for the next stage of our fight for these rights to be respected.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to express my delight at the adoption of the resolution on the persecution of Christians, of which I was also co-author. In addition, I would like to express my thanks to Mrs Ashton for her reaction to the situation of Christians in Alexandria. We remember the visit of the Syriac bishops from Iraq and their tragic accounts of the situation of Christians in Iraq. I would also like to mention, here John Paul II – in several months we will have the joy of his beatification – who was a great advocate for peace and dialogue between Christians, Jews, Muslims and followers of other religions. We remember the meetings in Assisi and John Paul II's visits both to a mosque and a synagogue in the name of respect and love to fellow men.

The situation of Christians around the world needs action from the European Union. It is our duty. We should use all political means, but we should also help those who have suffered materially because of persecution.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Mr President, as one of the co-authors, I voted for this historic resolution, but there are two important messages to the High Representative and the Commission which should be carried out as soon as possible.

Firstly, the Commission should develop, as a matter of urgency, an EU strategy on the enforcement of the right to freedom of religion, including a list of measures against states which knowingly fail to protect religious minorities.

Secondly, the Commission should develop a permanent system within the Human Rights Directorate of the External Action Service to monitor governmental restrictions on religious freedom and to report annually to Parliament.

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, religious freedom is the basis of civilisation. Without it, democracy is crippled and society is forced into a belief that denies humanity and human dignity.

This is what is happening in various parts of the world. Extremist and fundamentalist beliefs are triggering deadly acts of violence against Christians, who are becoming true modern martyrs. The intolerance that is giving rise to this violence is generated by a fundamentalist culture. This is why any manifestation that denies other people's religious or cultural identity must be immediately and unfailingly condemned. The international community and its institutions have a duty to safeguard respect for religious faith. They have not always taken swift action when Christians have been the victims of massacres.

The Chaldeans in Iraq and the Copts in Egypt are in danger of disappearing from regions in which they have lived for centuries. Once again, I would like to thank President Buzek for enthusiastically embracing the idea of a torchlight procession, a light for Christians in memory of all the victims of fundamentalism.

Religious freedom must become a banner of the human community, and my wish is for everyone to enjoy faith, hope and charity, but also justice and freedom.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, voted in favour of this resolution, because the issue of protecting religious minorities around the world is now more crucial than ever.

It is extremely worrying that in 2011, people are still being persecuted for their beliefs. Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union leaves no room for interpretation. It clearly lays down the right to full freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The attacks against certain religious communities that have taken place over the last few weeks are yet another indication of the urgent need for all governments to adopt effective measures to protect religious minorities, whatever the difficulties or threats.

The European Union's aim must be to foster inter-faith dialogue through greater cooperation between countries in Europe, but especially in countries where religious freedom is unfortunately not yet guaranteed. The right to religious freedom must be respected and guaranteed everywhere, without exception.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – *(FI)* Mr President, this is an historic, excellent resolution. We need to focus attention on freedom of religion in Europe. It is important for us to remember our roots, which are to be found in Judaeo-Christian values. Fundamental European values and rights are built on this heritage – on these roots. Perhaps what happened to the Coptic Christians in Egypt made us sit up and take note. Christians need protection in different parts of the world, and not just in Egypt: similar things have taken place in Turkey and Assyria.

We Europeans should also take a particular interest in the fact that there are situations in the European Union in which we should intervene. People are becoming victims of persecution because of their religion.

This, in turn, is due to a misplaced fear of Islam. We have forsaken our values and therefore trampled on Christian values at its expense. We should not act in this way; instead, we

need dialogue and freedom of religion. We need to ensure that we maintain our European cultural heritage, our Judaeo-Christian values, and defend them boldly. These values are a crucial part of our European identity.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I have voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion and I am happy that it has been adopted, but I still have some reservations about the use of veiled language. For example, it has not been unequivocally stated anywhere that the greatest problems Christians face are occurring in Islamic countries.

There again, in recital N, it is stated that Europe is not completely innocent when it comes to violation of freedom of religion. That may well be the case but, by saying that, we are putting occasional and isolated problems in Europe in the same category as structural discrimination of, and attacks against, Christians in Muslim countries. Besides, this is not just about bomb attacks and other forms of physical violence committed by Muslim extremists; in many Muslim countries, there is also an official policy that is directed against Christians. Just take the supposed unavailability of resources for renovating Christian churches in Turkey, or the difficulties surrounding the succession of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. The behaviour of the Turkish occupation forces in Cyprus is also a real scandal.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – (GA) Mr President, I attended the debate here yesterday. It was very interesting and very important. I also attended the candle lighting ceremony outside Parliament yesterday, and I thank our President, Jerzy Buzek, for the leadership he showed in that parade.

The persecution of Christians in recent times is reminiscent of the days of the Roman Empire when Christians were seen to be fair game for murder and attack. This has to be brought to an end. It is important that the European Union play its part here, and I think we are doing so, to ensure freedom of expression and freedom of practice for religious groups not only within the Union but also in applicant countries. That is a very important point around the world.

(GA) I am delighted that this historic resolution was adopted today, and especially that it was adopted unanimously.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, this resolution is very important, because it is first and because it comes at a particularly important moment. We know of the massacre of Christians in Iraq. We know what is happening in Egypt, and what has not happened there in recent years. We know of individual cases – but they are still important – of the murder of Christian clergy – and not only clergy – in Turkey, Syria and Pakistan. We know, too, what is going on in certain countries in Africa where there is a Muslim majority. In view of this, I am greatly surprised by the silence of the President of the European Commission, Mr Barroso. For a week, he did not comment. Only when pressed by the Prime Ministers of Member States – although not by the Prime Minister of my country – did he make a statement on this matter. It is good that Mrs Ashton has said something about this, but still, the head of the European Commission should have intervened immediately in this matter. He did not do so, and this is to be regretted.

Motions for resolutions: (RC-B7-0044/2010)

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, I am delighted that this House is cognisant of White Russia's slide into autocracy. The regime in Belarus represents a system of government that this continent ought to have put behind itself 20 years ago.

Nonetheless, I hope that this motion might prompt among some colleagues a measure of self-analysis. Look at it from the point of view of a former Soviet apparatchik analysing the European Union. I put it to you that he might find a few things that would make him feel rather at home. He would see that we are governed not by an elected president or an elected system, but by a 27-member Politburo called the European Commission, he would look and see this rubber-stamp Parliament that would make him feel a little nostalgic, he would see the series of five-year plans by which we administer our affairs, he would even see the fleet of special limousines and even special reserve shops for employees of the system and members of the nomenklatura.

Above all, he would see what Engels called 'the doctrine of false consciousness' – that when people vote, they do not understand their true interest and it is for us to impose a better system on them. I am reminded of that terrifying closing scene of Orwell's 'Animal Farm' where the animals look from man to pig and pig to man and find that they cannot tell which is which.

Mitro Repo (S&D). – (FI) Mr President, I also voted in favour of this resolution, which was, at the very least, necessary. In my opinion, the European Union should be particularly vigilant regarding the human rights violations that occur in its neighbouring regions. I would have liked to see more regarding the problems faced by youth. Youth organisations in Belarus are not allowed to act freely; instead, they have to go underground.

For more than a year now, young people in Europe have been in the habit of organising street events where they have gagged important statues in European capitals, because they are mute. This is a protest against the lack of freedom of speech in Belarus. I hope that young Europeans will not have to gag the European Parliament or keep us mute, but that we can courageously defend our values and democracy.

Kristian Vigenin, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (BG) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament supports the resolution tabled. We believe that it will be an important signal both to the Belarusian authorities and to civil society, the media and everyone fighting for the country's democratic development. We hope that the measures proposed in the resolution will be given careful consideration and be discussed by the Commission and the Council, and will be implemented as fast as possible to have an effect.

In fact, the inauguration ceremony for the re-elected President Lukashenko scheduled for tomorrow will not stop the issues that have been raised about him, the legality of the elections and the way in which the results in these elections were recorded. Up to now, the European Union has used various policies and mechanisms to influence Belarus and the Belarus leadership, with modest results. Perhaps it is time to consider new options or whether we do not have a new situation in the region which will allow us to apply other mechanisms.

Something that was alluded to in the resolution, which we consider extremely important and which has not been tried so far, is coordinating our policy and relations with Belarus with its immediate non-EU neighbours, that is to say, Russia, which is our strategic partner,

and Ukraine, which is part of the Eastern Partnership. I think that through joint and coordinated efforts, we could achieve, if nothing else, at least an environment which would be politically more conducive to fair and democratic parliamentary elections, elections which are scheduled for next year.

The European Parliament also has to make fullest use of the options that are there. Today, we decided to send a delegation to Belarus, and I believe that allowing this delegation to visit the country and giving it the necessary assistance and contacts will be a test for the Belarus leadership. It will also allow us to get a clear idea and to see for ourselves the options the situation there holds.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, firstly, I would like to express my indignation at Mr Hannan's comparing Belarus to the European Union. His nonsensical statement was all the more unpleasant because it was applauded by some of my fellow Members from Poland among the European Conservatives and Reformists.

The Lukashenko regime should be isolated. The current policy of believing that the regime will gradually become open to democracy has turned out to be a miscalculation. The sanctions which should be imposed on Lukashenko's regime should be harsh, for among other reasons, that it is a country which is an immediate neighbour of Europe. In relation to such countries, we should expect the same standards as for the Member States of the European Union. In particular, I would like the European Commission to support independent media such as TV Belsat, Radio Racyja and others. They are important for spreading information so that it reaches the citizens of Belarus.

Adam Bielan (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, the events in Belarus associated with the presidential elections have once again shaken public opinion in Europe. After a period of relative calm, President Lukashenko is again using force against opposition activists. He has turned again to the most shameful features of his dictatorship. The brutal clash with the participants of a peaceful demonstration and the arrest of opposition leaders and opposition candidates in the elections is a clear violation of human rights and signifies the abandonment of measures intended to improve relations with the democratic countries of Europe.

Therefore, I endorse in full Parliament's resolution calling for the immediate release of political prisoners and for the elections to be repeated. I strongly condemn the dictatorial practices of President Lukashenko's regime. I believe that pressure from European institutions will help ease the repression of Belarusian citizens. I also endorse all measures which support the development of civil society by relaxing visa policy, awarding grants to students and academic staff, and providing funding for independent organisations and media.

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, there is no doubt that Belarus is something of a headache for Europe, and it is right that we should take every opportunity to criticise the regime as – fortunately – the last Communist dictatorship. We have a saying in Denmark that those who live in glasshouses should not throw stones, and therefore it is perhaps worth taking a look at what the EU looks like from the point of view of Belarus. Well, the EU is governed by a Commission made up of officials with absolutely no popular mandate, and it is only this Commission, made up of people with no popular movement behind them, no one to report to and no mandate from the citizens, that can table proposals. Once those proposals have been put forward and adopted, who is it who, with enormous political influence, ultimately decides how the EU legislation is to be implemented in the

Member States? Again, it is people who have not been democratically elected, it is judges who sit at a nice comfortable distance from reality. The same can be said about this Parliament, where the vast majority are very comfortable inside the glass palaces where they have been placed, with no one to answer to at all and no understanding of the enormous concerns, opposition and agitation there is among the European citizens. If we look at the EU from Belarus's point of view, we may see many frightening similarities to the dictatorships that we are trying to fight against.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I endorsed the resolution, being aware of the fact that the situation in Belarus is a very specific one. We are facing a fierce intensification of repression directed against human rights defenders. On the other hand, there is a sense in which this is happening as a result of the very thoughtless policy of some of the European Union's Member States, because it is certain that it was absolutely unnecessary to lend credibility to Mr Lukashenko in the eyes of Europe and the European Union as has been done by Mr Berlusconi, who has visited Belarus, the President of Lithuania, Mrs Grybauskaitė, and the foreign ministers of Germany and Poland. We need to fight, today, for civil liberties in Belarus, although we should do this while trying to avoid pushing Belarus into the arms of Russia, because this, too, is very important.

Report: Derk Jan Eppink (A7-0374/2010)

Sergej Kozlík (ALDE). – (SK) Mr President, experience from a number of Member States shows that, six years after Council Regulation No 1/2003, there had still been no positive movement over the consistent application of competition rules.

When deciding on disputes, national courts are not making use of the possibility of requesting information or an opinion on a given case from the European Commission, nor are they making use of the right to turn to the European Court of Justice with a preliminary question, and nor is the Commission making use of the right to intervene as an *amicus curiae*. Practice points to considerable problems with judicial application in this area, including major deviations from the settled case-law of the European courts. I have therefore called on the Commission to pay attention to the decisions of the national courts, and to take the measures necessary for achieving this objective. This call has been written into the Report on Competition Policy, and I have supported the final text of the report.

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, there is no doubt that European competitiveness is under considerable pressure. We have to question whether there really is a will among the Member States to do something about this. One thing is clear, however, and that is that we have created a currency, a common currency, that is proving disastrous for the economy in the whole of southern Europe. One reason for this is that the majority of those countries cannot keep up and have completely failed to implement the reforms that are necessary if we are to cope with future competition with China, India, South America and others. However, even in those areas that we would like to regard as areas of low-hanging fruit, as easy areas, it is impossible to reach agreement. One example is a clear initiative like the common European patent. It is appalling that, in this area, which is simply a matter of technicalities, we have not once been able to reach agreement. This is an example of how ineffective the EU is. In an area that could so easily be so beneficial, we have allowed language differences to get in the way of us reaching agreement. In reality, this probably speaks volumes about the false foundation on which the whole of this cooperation is based.

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciated the flexibility the Commission showed in drawing up the temporary State aid measures, which

were introduced as a response to the financial and economic crisis. I also agree that it is a good idea to prepare a detailed evaluation of the decisions taken, in order to ensure equal conditions of competition within the Union.

I agree with the call for the Commission to ensure that banks reimburse the exorbitant levels of State aid they received, thereby ensuring fair competition within the internal market. I was one of the people who criticised the vast amounts of aid provided using taxpayers' money. I believe that public money should have been used to promote growth.

I hope that this will be the last time that taxpayers' savings are used to benefit bank shareholders and careless managers, and that new controls will be put in place to prevent speculation from damaging the economy again in the future.

I welcome the willingness to support the use of aid to promote common-interest projects, particularly those involving renewable energy.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – (GA) Mr President, I was pleased to support this resolution as well.

I would say that one of the primary functions of the European Union is to guarantee fair competition for all, and particularly for SMEs and, of course, consumers.

There has long been suspicion that people are exploiting the market and, at this moment, in my country, people are alarmed at the uniform and systematic rise, for instance, in petrol and diesel prices at all pumps throughout the country.

Likewise, farmers have long been suspicious that there is a cartel operating, particularly when it comes to uniform and speedy reduction of cattle prices at the slightest whim.

And, of course, recently we saw that the European Court ruled against telecommunications companies regarding roaming charges in Europe.

So we have to be constantly vigilant and be prepared to take firm and immediate action whenever there is unfair competition.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, this is an important report, which has been written by someone with huge experience in the area. I think it has to be said very clearly that the European Union deserves to have greater openness and greater competition. We should not be afraid of this. It fosters Europe's development in a situation when, speaking very frankly, we are behind when compared to America and Asia. A resolution of this kind serves to make the European economy more effective, which is why it is so important and so necessary, and therefore I voted in favour of its adoption.

Report: Michael Gahler (A7-0377/2010)

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, I wish to thank the rapporteur, Mr Gahler, for this excellent report. It takes excellent account of the needs of the European Union's High North, and the sustainable development that is needed there. Because I myself come from a northern area, it gave me great pleasure to follow this process. I found that the report took into consideration issues relating to climate and livelihood to a satisfactory degree. For example, it considered the issue of reindeer husbandry, which is a very important source of livelihood in this region. Mr Gahler also took excellent account of the sole indigenous European people, the Sami.

I especially want to praise and thank Mr Gahler for giving attention to the amendment I tabled concerning the establishment of an Arctic Information Centre at the University of

Lapland, and, furthermore, for mentioning it in the report. That is very important. I am pleased that the Finns are demonstrating crossparty cooperation on this matter. This is about the future of Finland's northern dimension and the whole of northern Europe, one in which we want to see sustainable development.

Report: Traian Ungureanu (A7-0378/2010)

Kristian Vigenin, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (BG) The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament believes that the report on the Black Sea strategy really is important and timely, because it provides an assessment of what has been achieved in the Black Sea region so far and gives a number of recommendations as to what the European Union can still do in this respect.

We believe that the political coordination among partners who have highly differentiated levels of cooperation with the European Union is difficult, but not impossible. It also makes sense at a political level to try and combine our efforts, bearing in mind that three of the countries are European Union Member States, one is a strategic partner, and others are part of the Eastern Partnership, while Turkey is a candidate for membership

The European Union's inability to engage more energetically in the region has, at least hitherto, deprived us of the development and opportunity to use a great potential, and in this sense, we should say at the present time that the Black Sea Synergy, which, from the outset, was assessed as an insufficiently ambitious initiative on the part of the European Union, has to be developed into a proper strategy for the Black Sea.

We already have models of interaction that can be applied successfully, provided, of course, that we adapt them to the region. An example is the Baltic Sea strategy, which, at macro level, has been successful in developing regional cooperation.

We believe that several steps – not all of which were included in the report – need to be taken right now. First, at a practical level, within the framework of the neighbourhood policy review being done at the moment, we have to consider a greater coherence between the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership, as almost all countries of the Eastern Partnership save Belarus are also part of the Black Sea Synergy.

The second aspect is that political dialogue needs to be strengthened at ministerial as well as parliamentary level, and we should try and find a greater coherence between the Danubian strategy and future initiatives for the Black Sea region. All this should result in a strategy that can go on stream with separate budgetary funding in the next budget framework.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the proposal contained in Mr Ungureanu's resolution, which has now been adopted, for Black Sea policy to become a fully-fledged strategy, is worthy of widespread support. The fact that Bulgaria and Romania are EU Member States, the Eastern Partnership – the special relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership and with Russia – and the negotiations being carried on with other countries in the region on EU membership all justify the region's political significance for the European Union. The Black Sea has become an important region for the transit of energy resources and for promising projects which are important for the Union, such as the Nabucco project, which is strategically important for the diversification of gas supply. I fully share, too, the opinion of Mr Ungureanu, whom I congratulate on the report, that the strategy must ensure the recognition of all actors in the region, and not just of the biggest states, and that it must fit in with other strategies, such as the strategy for the Mediterranean Sea.

Alajos Mészáros (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, part of the Black Sea became an inland sea of the European Union. The region is of exceptional strategic importance and our involvement there needs to be intensified. To this end, it is vital for Parliament to draw up a new strategy, in addition to providing financial and human resources, in the form of a separate item of the EU budget. The new strategy must serve to ensure the peace, stability and prosperity of the Black Sea region, and to guarantee the energy security of the EU. The diversification of supply lines and resources must be given even higher priority, and I would therefore like to stress the importance of the planned development of liquid natural gas terminals at Black Sea ports. The transit routes crossing the region could also significantly improve supply to the EU. Further intensification of cooperation with the countries of the Black Sea is a vital element of the success of Nabucco, the Trans-Adriatic pipeline and the Pan-European oil pipeline, which are of special significance to the EU. For this reason, I voted in favour of the report.

Motions for resolutions: (RC-B7-0044/2010)

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, just as in the case of Belarus, I wanted to give my reason for the way I voted on the EU's Black Sea strategy. I want to start by saying that the timing of the idea from my colleague, Traian Ungureanu, to draft an own-initiative report is extremely apt when the European Union is strengthening its regional policy by devising strategies for coastal regions such as the Baltic Sea, the High North and, in this instance, the Black Sea.

I also wish to say how pleased I am that the amendments which I tabled have been included in the resolution text. These amendments highlighted the need to create a network of NGOs in this region, encourage programmes promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, as well as initiatives such as the Black Sea Universities Network. In my view, all these measures are good examples of the way in which interaction between civil societies can generate positive synergy in the region.

Finally, I wanted to stress not only the need to strike a balance between economic development and environmental protection, but also the need to implement fully the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution. I hope that this initiative adopted today in Parliament will receive the attention it is due from the Council as well, which ought to deal with this matter as a priority issue for the European agenda.

Written explanations of vote

Report: Ana Gomes (A7-0368/2010)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) Taking into account the geographical situation of Libya and the economic interdependence between the EU and Libya, the pursuit of an EU/Libya strategic partnership is in the common interest. Nevertheless, we cannot forget the dictatorial regime that rules this country, with a lack of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In spite of the clear interest of many Member States in pursuing a framework agreement with Libya, the EU cannot forget the fundamental values it defends and subordinate itself to economic interests only. A partnership is needed in order to implement legal reforms with regard to human rights in the country and, at the same time, enable the diversification of the national economy, bearing in mind some progress that has already been made, such as giving up its nuclear programme, or even international obligations that the state has with regard to human rights, in spite of sanctions applied by the UN.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE), *in writing.* – I voted in favour of this resolution on the negotiations on the EU-Libya Framework Agreement. Libya remains an authoritarian regime, its population does not enjoy basic human rights, and capital punishment is regularly carried out. The state institutions are not democratically accountable and state power is not anchored in the rule of law. Nevertheless, Libya has expanding commercial and political relations with EU Member States, and the country is strategically important for the EU. Negotiations on an EU-Libya Framework Agreement started in November 2008.

However, the development of relations must ensure full respect for European values and principles, and it is important to request firmly that the Council and the Commission take necessary steps – such as strongly recommending that Libya ratify and implement the Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951 and its 1967 protocol; requesting that the Libyan authorities sign a memorandum of understanding granting UNHCR a legal presence in the country; encouraging Libya to commit to a moratorium on the death penalty, etc. – in order to protect European values.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I welcome the commitments made under the framework agreement being negotiated at the moment, which covers a vast range of issues, from strengthening political dialogue to managing migration, from developing trade and economic relations to energy security and improved cooperation in a number of sectors. I believe that the framework agreement could be an opportunity to strengthen the political dialogue between Libya and the EU. I would highlight the role of the framework agreement, which includes measures to assist the development of institutional capacity as a means of reinforcing civil society, aids modernisation, encourages the introduction of democratic reforms and the creation of independent social communication and the rule of law, and supports other efforts aimed at opening up space for companies, academic institutions, non-governmental organisations and other Libyan players.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The economic partnership between Europe and Libya is already a reality. Libya holds the largest confirmed oil reserves in Africa and is Europe's third largest energy (oil and gas) supplier. What is more, the EU is Libya's biggest trading partner (with 70% of its total trade in 2009). Europe has to recognise that Libya plays an important role in the field of regional and world security, both in the context of containing Islamic extremism and also in the context of regional stabilisation.

Therefore, it is to be welcomed that a partnership framework agreement is being negotiated but, as is quite clear in the report, it must not leave aside certain questions that I consider to be fundamental: the progressive democratisation of the regime; greater respect for human rights, in particular, freedom in its various forms; a progressive change in the criminal law system, aiming to abandon the death penalty; acceptance of the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court; and ratification of the 1951 Geneva Convention.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The opening of negotiations between the European Union and Libya constitutes an opportunity to guarantee better economic development conditions for both parties and, at the same time, promote a serious change in the Mediterranean region and in Africa with regard to respect for human rights, to their contribution to global peace and stability, and to combating climate change. Libya has 6 million inhabitants, 2 million of whom are foreigners. It has the largest proven oil reserves in Africa and is Europe's third most important supplier of energy, in the form of oil and gas. The EU is its biggest trade partner: transactions between the two parties represent

almost 70% of Libya's trade in 2009. The framework partnership agreement with the EU must be seen as an opportunity to demonstrate the advantages of human values and democracy in terms of sustained and diversified development. As this report points out, this process cannot be dissociated from the fundamental values of the EU, such as combating the death penalty and discrimination against minorities, immigrants and refugees, such as promoting public health, and such as the need for political democratisation.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) Implementing a framework agreement designed to promote cooperation in the fight against illegal immigration and aiming, at the same time, at political dialogue based on human rights, is one of the priorities for the Union's Mediterranean policy. Even though the final text contains a few inaccuracies, I think we should support it, in the hope that it will spur the government in Tripoli to greater efforts in the fight against trafficking in human beings in the region, and also make it take stock of the situation in order to become a responsible partner in other areas, such as security and energy.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) Libya is a country which requires a great deal of work. A dictatorship, ignorance of human rights, lack of a migration policy and a poorly developed health service are just some of the problems which Libyans and foreigners living in Libya have to face up to every day. On the other hand, the potential, the rich natural resources and the cultural heritage of this region of Africa are values which can enable Libya to achieve economic development, an improvement in the quality of life of the people who live there and the opening up of the country to international markets. Hammering out suitable conditions for the EU-Libya agreement, which means persuading the Libyan authorities to end practices which violate fundamental human rights, to change migration policy and to accept legal responsibility, will bring mutual benefits and contribute to the region's development.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The report adopted today contains proposals that the European Parliament considers indispensable in order to wind up the ongoing negotiations between the European Union and Libya aimed at the conclusion of a cooperation agreement. The conclusion of the framework agreement would provide an opportunity to tackle important issues such as political relations, immigration and security, energy, public health, development, trade, climate change, energy and culture. At the same time, it would be a decisive step towards achieving the more general aim of improving relations between the Mediterranean area of the European Union and Africa. As an Italian MEP, I have to emphasise the historical and economic reasons that have led to Italy's favourable relations with Libya over the years. At the same time, I have to emphasise the importance of strengthening cooperation between the EU and Libya, and by this I mean cooperation not just in economic matters, but also from the point of view of safeguarding human rights. It is my hope that the European Union can play a leading role in the reception of migrants and in supporting the fight against trafficking in human beings.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (FR) This report is astonishing in its contradictions. It welcomes negotiations on the EU-Libya Framework Agreement with a view to eventually bringing Libya into the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (EMFTA) that eurocracy has been preparing for the past 15 years. However, it also lists a whole series of violations of human rights and democracy by a regime it describes as authoritarian. Meanwhile, the common position against Cuba is being maintained. This is a case of double standards. For today's European Union, the prerequisite for trade is not respect for human rights and democracy but rather the establishment of a market economy and free, distorted

competition. The Union represents cowardly imperialism, as evidenced by its belated response to the situation in Tunisia.

Nuno Melo (PPE), in writing. – (PT) We are all aware that Libya is persisting in a dictatorial regime, and is systematically violating international conventions on fundamental rights and freedoms. In spite of these facts, Libya has been expanding its trade and political relations with a number of EU Member States. The role of Libya, as partner on many issues in the Mediterranean region and in Africa, has been found to have a major impact on the security and stability of the region, in particular, on migration, public health, development, trade and economic relations, climate change, energy and cultural heritage. In this context, the framework agreement being negotiated at the moment is important, but we must not fail to respond to several fundamental issues, in particular: the progressive democratisation of the regime, respect for human rights, changes to the criminal justice system, with the abolition of the death penalty as a first priority, and signing up to the Geneva Convention.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) On account of their complexity and significance for Europe, relations between the European Union and Libya must be considered objectively. Naturally, respect for human rights play an important role, which is why it also makes sense for Brussels to call on Libya to ratify the Geneva Convention on Refugees of 1951 or to urge a moratorium on the death penalty. However, we must also consider the fact that Libya is an important transit country for illegal mass immigration from Africa to Europe. For this reason, no purpose will be served by a general rejection of a readmission agreement with Tripoli, as contained in the report from the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

If we do not get a readmission agreement with Libya, the pressure on Europe as a destination for immigrants will increase even further. Because illegal mass immigration is a vital issue in relation to the survival of Europe as an historical entity, the EU would be well advised to take a differentiated view of its relations with Tripoli and to include Libya in its strategies for controlling the flow of migration.

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of the proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the negotiations on the EU-Libya Framework Agreement. I fully support the key points made by Mrs Gomes in the report, i.e. the need for Libya to introduce a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, to ratify the Geneva Convention on Refugees, to actively fight trafficking of human beings, to guarantee fair agreements for illegal migrants and to adopt modern asylum laws.

I would like to add that on several occasions, we have requested that the European institutions be allowed to check the actual conditions in refugee camps in Libya before a framework agreement is reached. Parliament should take immediate action to raise the issue more vigorously. As far as I and many of my fellow Members are concerned, we will be unable to support the framework agreement unless the requirements made by Mrs Gomes in the report adopted today are met.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), in writing. – (IT) The current negotiations between the European Union and Libya to finalise a framework agreement designed to promote political and economic relations between the Member States and this Maghreb country are of crucial strategic importance to the Union's cross-border relations. I therefore voted in favour of the European Parliament recommendation to the Council. The primary aim of the agreement is to improve the lives of the Libyan people in political, social and economic terms through the promotion of fundamental rights as the founding basis of the agreement. The agreement will seek to make up for Libya's shortcomings by providing greater protection of human

and democratic rights and developing commercial cooperation, as well as by establishing strict joint controls over illegal immigration.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) The green light has reluctantly been given for the negotiations between the EU and Libya to continue, as a means of strengthening our relationship. However, it is anything but a blank cheque. Our energy security, our commercial and economic interests, and our cooperation in managing migratory flows should never conceal the continual disregard shown by the Libyan authorities and Colonel Gaddafi for the most basic human rights. Colonel Gaddafi is a dictator who has been in power for 41 years, and who said just a few days ago that he regrets the departure of his Tunisian counterpart, Mr Ben Ali. It is a repressive regime: death penalties (506 in May 2009 – of which 50% were foreigners), executions and corporal punishment, illegal detention and inhumane treatment of migrants crossing its territory to reach Europe.

Our resolution particularly stresses this point by recalling that any common migration policy must be conditional on more stringent safeguards for the protection of migrants and other fundamental freedoms. Similarly, any readmission agreement with that country should automatically exclude asylum seekers, refugees, or those in need of protection, and should avoid collective expulsions.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), in writing. – For over 40 years, Libya has been ruled by a dictatorial regime in which power is concentrated in one man, Colonel Gaddafi, the longest serving African and Arab leader. Libyans enjoy free education and healthcare and subsidised housing, benefiting from some degree of social distribution of the oil income. Yet, despite the GDP growth rates, development lags behind that of other oil-rich countries and Libya is one of the less diversified economies in the region, foreign investment remaining at the mercy of the unpredictable decisions of the ruler.

The Libyan people do not enjoy basic human rights and freedoms, despite the fact that their state has specific international obligations to respect human rights, having been recently elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council and having ratified a number of legally binding international instruments. Capital punishment is regularly carried out.

In conclusion, Libya's strategic importance and the many challenges it poses underline the need for a comprehensive EU policy towards Libya. The EU needs to engage with Libya across a broad range of issues. This framework agreement must also be a substantive tool to promote the rule of law, respect for human rights, protection of migrants and refugees and sustainable development in Libya.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), in writing. – (IT) I voted in favour of this resolution because I believe that it can help the Libyan people to improve their living conditions, which are often conditioned by a lack of respect for human rights and the most basic freedoms.

Cooperation between the EU and Libya may be a decisive factor in boosting the potential of the country, which is currently having to get to grips with a very complex situation. Prisoners often suffer torture, corporal punishment such as flogging, beating, electric shocks and the deliberate withholding of medical assistance. There are no asylum laws in Libya and, as a result, there is no legal recognition of the need to guarantee protection for refugees.

As if this were not enough, the death penalty still applies to a large number of crimes, and death sentences continue to be handed down by the Libyan courts, in breach of international standards concerning the right to a fair trial. The European Union must conclude the

framework agreement as soon as possible. It will be the first proper agreement between Libya and the EU, and will therefore bring real benefits to the local population in terms of their fundamental rights as well as in political and socio-economic terms.

Debora Serracchiani (S&D), *in writing.* – (IT) Today's vote on the EU-Libya Framework Agreement is the result of some tough negotiations, particularly on the issue of migrants. In Libya, the situation regarding human rights for refugees and asylum seekers is extremely dangerous. They have no legal recognition and there is no system in place to protect them. I hope that their fundamental human rights will be safeguarded, along with their right to asylum.

Libya has not ratified the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 or the Protocol of 1967 relating to the Status of Refugees, and at the moment, does not intend to do so. However, in 1981, it did ratify the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. It is therefore bound to comply with the principle of non-refoulement of migrants requiring international protection, who must be identified in accordance with criteria that are no less strict than those established by the Geneva Convention itself.

Under international law, people from countries such as Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia have the right to humanitarian protection and political asylum, and I hope that the Libyan authorities will agree to cooperate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Motions for resolutions: (RC-B7-0039/2010)

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE), *in writing.* – I voted in favour of this important resolution as we have to condemn in the strongest terms the recent attacks on Christian communities around the world – be it in Egypt, Pakistan, Iraq or any other country.

Christian communities have been living in various Muslim countries of the Middle East since the early days of Christianity. It is therefore totally unacceptable that, after centuries of peaceful cohabitation, Christians should be forced to flee these countries or be closed up in ghettos. This is yet another reason to continue our struggle against Islamic fundamentalists who distort reality and want to portray our global action against terrorism as an attack on the Muslim world. It is precisely the Islamic fundamentalists who are seeking war between religions and civilisations.

We must therefore do everything possible to root out these religious fanatics and to marginalise them in their respective societies. This has to be done in cooperation with the moderate elements of Muslim societies. We should therefore welcome vigorous public reactions in certain Muslim countries, such as Egypt for example, where the general public strongly condemned terrorist attacks against Christians and demanded action against those responsible.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) We were all very shocked at the recent terrorist attack against the Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad. This attack comes on top of a series of grave events, all of which were religiously motivated. This is a very sensitive subject. The European People's Party (Christian Democrats) is very attached to secular principles and is in favour of respect being shown for all religions in Europe, including Islam. This being so, we cannot remain indifferent to the fate awaiting a number of Christian communities throughout the world. Every religion must be shown equal respect, and that is why I endorsed this European Parliament resolution. All of the events that Parliament is condemning took place in Muslim countries, where particular attention must be paid to

the fate of Christians. Hence, we must all work towards ensuring respect for different religious beliefs, and I believe that this text is in keeping with that approach.

Dominique Baudis (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion, which condemns the deadly attacks against Christians in the East. The attacks against Christians in recent months are a tragedy for the many victims, particularly in Baghdad and Alexandria, but also for their co-religionists. Christians have lived in the East for 2 000 years; they are inscribed in the history of their country. Today, however, they are fleeing the region en masse. Because of this forced exile, these countries are losing a substantial proportion of their human resources. The Near and Middle East regions have always been an area of diversity and cohabitation of religious minorities. The terrorists behind these attacks are trying to instigate a clash between East and West, pitting the Muslim world against the Christian world. All of this has been fiendishly planned. Christians in Iraq and Egypt may be feeling abandoned and betrayed. It is important that the Egyptian and Iraqi authorities find and harshly judge the authors of these massacres.

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) This House has at last been able to vote on a wide-ranging resolution on the situation of Christians around the world. Europe needs to do much more than it has done so far in terms of protecting Christians around the world. It has the instruments to do so, if it wants to. The hope is that this resolution will mark the beginning of a change in approach by Union bodies, especially from a diplomatic and commercial viewpoint, in their bilateral dialogues with the many – too many – countries that tolerate anti-Christian persecutions, or even lend support to the culture of Christianophobia. When the EU signs commercial, economic and cooperation agreements with third countries, it really must enforce the human rights clauses with great determination, which is something it has not done up to now. It is no longer acceptable to see that countries where Christians are discriminated against and persecuted have signed important agreements with the EU that are fundamentally based on respect for human rights. I therefore declare my vote in favour of the resolution.

Antonio Cancian (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I support the motion for a resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion, because European politics should not ignore the escalation of violence that has taken place in recent months.

Europe must not be overcautious and afraid to support the right of Christian communities in the Middle East and around the world to profess their faith and religion freely. Dialogue and mutual respect are inalienable values for the European Union, and it is essential for the High Representative, Catherine Ashton, to become a spokesperson for this position, and to strongly uphold it in our bilateral relations with other countries.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I congratulate the European Union on having repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to religious freedom, freedom of conscience and freedom of thought. Governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms throughout the world, bearing in mind that the development of human rights, democracy and civil liberties is the common base on which the European Union builds its relations with other countries, and which is provided for in the clause relating to democracy inscribed in the agreements concluded between the EU and third countries.

David Casa (PPE), *in writing*. – We have all witnessed the plight of Coptic Christians in Egypt in the last months. Such acts of violence should be condemned in the most absolute of terms. It is not only intolerance towards Christians that should be condemned but rather

any form of intolerance towards the exercise of a person's religious freedom. I believe that this resolution was well balanced and I have thus voted in favour of the resolution.

Lara Comi (PPE), in writing. – (IT) I am pleased that the European Parliament has debated and adopted a resolution condemning the recent attacks on Christians. Religious freedom is one of the main fundamental human rights; one that is generally recognised by national constitutions and international conventions. The existence of so many standards at various levels of governance, both national and international, and all over the world, shows that there is unanimous consensus about the importance of religious freedom. However, legislation is not enough. It is the foundation on which to build effective policies. Over the last 50 years, the globalisation process has brought distant civilisations into contact with each another. In order to make sure that such contact does not turn into conflict, it is not enough just to condemn the recent attacks. We need to reaffirm our commitment to the creation of policies that encourage religious pluralism and ensure that different groups learn to be tolerant of each other. It is not just fundamentalism that is the threat. Today, religious freedom is also under attack from widespread secularism, which is trying to eliminate the spiritual world of the individual from public life. Religious freedom concerns all religions; it even concerns atheists. This is because, when there is acceptance of religious freedom, there is also acceptance of its opposite, in other words, the freedom not to profess any religion.

Corina Crețu (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The increase in attacks against Christians requires a common stance on how to protect them. In order to increase religious tolerance, the relevant governments must guarantee that the perpetrators of the attacks are identified and brought to justice by due legal process. Protection must be afforded to Christians on the basis of equal respect for any denomination.

In the situation where respect for human rights and civil liberties, including freedom of religion or belief, are fundamental principles and objectives of the European Union and provide common ground for relations with third countries, it must reaffirm its support for any initiative aimed at promoting dialogue and mutual respect among religious and other communities.

Last but not least, religious authorities are called on to promote tolerance and adopt initiatives against hatred, violent radicalisation and extremism.

Mário David (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I was one of the earliest supporters of this motion for a resolution, whose description of the situation endured by Christian minorities in some countries of the Middle East I believe to be timely and accurate, to a large extent. One of the most noble functions of the European Parliament, as regards external action, is the defence and promotion of the values in which we believe: in this case, we are specifically referring to freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and freedom of religion. These freedoms have clearly been called into question through the cowardly attacks of religious fanatics, who have murdered innocent people, sometimes on a massive scale, in a way that I consider both inhuman and incomprehensible.

I hope that this resolution, supported by all the parliamentary groups, will help to increase awareness among members of the public, and among senior government and public administration figures in the countries concerned of the importance of the full exercise of fundamental freedoms in their countries and of bringing murderers and agitators to justice. These are important in order to promote both inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue

internally and between our societies, which, despite living on different continents, share quite a number of common values and visions.

Philippe de Villiers (EFD), *in writing*. – (FR) As of 2011, the Christian community is the most persecuted in the world; fortunately, European Member States have noticed and are beginning to respond.

Our condemnation of the attacks is fair and necessary, but insufficient: the principle of reciprocity does not appear in this resolution.

Moreover, the EU's half-hearted condemnation of Turkey's actions in the area of Cyprus that it occupies militarily, alas, will not be followed by the results that the French people have been hoping for – the cessation of accession negotiations with Turkey – and will provide no incentive whatsoever.

I support this resolution in support of Christians murdered around the world, but nevertheless regret certain omissions and inconsistencies.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Attacks on Christians are increasing throughout the world. This worrying and deplorable fact has to be deeply regretted, particularly since Christianity preaches peace and understanding between men, regardless of whether they are Jews or Greeks, as St Paul would say. What is being threatened is the religious freedom and peace of communities that have existed for centuries. They have lived peacefully alongside other religions in the areas where they are settled and are the subject of indiscriminate violence simply because they believe in Christ. The question goes much further, however. Apart from the attacks that have been made, the Christian faith and its manifestations are also being attacked in Europe itself, often in the guise of the corruption of such concepts as secularity and the neutrality of states and institutions. In this respect, I must deplore the recent attacks on the celebration of Catholic mass in Barcelona and call on the Spanish Government and the European institutions to condemn and combat the Christophobic atmosphere that seems to be on the rise. Those who deny their own roots deserve little respect from anyone else.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Everyone has the right to freedom of religion, conscience and thought. This right confers the freedom to practice your own religion or beliefs, individually or together with others, both in public and in private, through worship, rites, practices and teaching. Statistics on religious freedom show that the majority of acts of religious violence are against Christians. In fact, it is well known that innocent lives have recently been lost in bloody attacks against Christian communities in Nigeria, Alexandria, the Philippines, Iraq and Syria. In addition, the Iranian Government has intensified its campaign against Christians in the Islamic Republic. In Vietnam, too, there is severe repression of the activities of the Catholic Church and other religious communities. In addition to condemning these attacks and urging governments to guarantee freedom of religion, conscience and thought, the Council, Commission and also the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs must dedicate greater attention to the issue of religious freedom and take specific, urgent measures, including measures against the countries that deliberately do not protect religious confessions.

Carlo Fidanza (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The resolution voted on today showed great concern for the rising intolerance, repression and acts of violence against Christians. I think it is crucial to condemn the recent episodes in countries which are far away but have an established Christian community. The events in Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines,

Cyprus, Iran and Iraq are even more serious when you consider that religion is being exploited merely for the sake of wielding power. The European Union, through its High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, should make freedom of religion and belief and the security of religious communities, including Christians, a priority in the Union's international relations. This priority should be reflected in international agreements and in reports on human rights. I am convinced that religious freedom must be strenuously defended, even at the cost of inflicting heavy sanctions on countries which fail to respect this fundamental principle.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) As the resolution states, the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights must be considered to be among the most important aims of the European Union. In recent months, we have witnessed an upsurge of violence against Christian minorities around the world, particularly in countries where Islam is the majority religion. This can no longer be tolerated. I support this resolution, in the hope that the European institutions will fight religious intolerance more firmly and use all the means at their disposal to ensure safety and freedom of worship for the millions of Christians scattered around the world.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), *in writing*. – (FI) Next week, we celebrate Holocaust Memorial Day, which, of course, will take us back to the past, and Auschwitz. It was a good thing that the resolution that we have adopted brings us to the present time, to consider the martyrs of today. The premise is that freedom of religion must apply to all religions.

Since we raise the issue separately of the persecution experienced by Christians, this does not mean that we are biased. It is because this, the largest group of those suffering persecution, is the one that tends to be the easiest to forget about in Europe. It is time to put this right, for we know that in the last century, more Christians died because of their faith than in the previous 1 900 years. Of those killed now because of their religion, 75% are Christians.

Open Doors International has listed the 10 countries where Christians encounter most violence in the world. They are North Korea, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Maldives, Afghanistan, Yemen, Mauritania, Laos and Uzbekistan, but the list goes on. Approximately 100 million Christians every day suffer violence because of their religion.

Obviously, something concrete must come from the resolution that we have adopted. The European External Action Service must show determination and address these failings surrounding freedom of religion. Our foreign policy agreements with third countries must include a clause on freedom of religion and reciprocity. From the perspective of the promotion of human rights, it is crucially important to speak about freedom of religion, because that is the human rights litmus test: freedom of speech and expression and freedom of association lie at the heart of human rights.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) In recent years, 75% of terrorist attacks of a religious nature have been against Christians. In the last few months in particular, there has been an increase in the number of attacks, including direct attacks on churches while services were being held. It is unacceptable in the 21st century for religious communities to have to be afraid to practise their faith freely. The principle of the freedom of religion must apply to everyone throughout the world. I therefore support the proposal to develop a strategy to actually enable the right to freedom of religious expression to be exercised.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) My Christian roots cannot but condemn any act of violence against Christians and other religious communities around the world. Likewise, this condemnation extends to any kind of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and faith against practitioners of a religion. I believe the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right, which we hope to protect by means of this resolution.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this resolution, which strongly condemns all acts of violence against Christians and other religious communities, as well as all kinds of discrimination and intolerance based on religion and belief, against religious people, apostates and non-believers. The resolution stresses that the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is a fundamental human right, and it expresses concern about the exodus of Christians from various countries, especially Middle Eastern countries, in recent years.

I urge the authorities of states with alarmingly high levels of attacks against religious denominations to take responsibility for ensuring normal and public religious practices for all religious denominations; to step up their efforts to provide reliable and efficient protection for the religious denominations in their countries; and to ensure the personal safety and physical integrity of members of religious denominations there, thereby complying with the obligations to which they have already committed themselves in the international arena.

Kyriakos Mavronikolas (S&D), *in writing*. – (EL) As socialists, we support human rights as one of our basic policies. Religious rights are an integral part of this policy and that is why we are in favour of strengthening them. The events at Christmas, when the occupying forces interrupted mass in Rizokarpaso in occupied Cyprus, were an abomination. State terrorism is being imposed in Turkish-occupied Cyprus by Turkey and the occupying army, at the expense of the Orthodox Christians, especially the few remaining Greek Cypriots trapped there.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (FR) The French Republic's concept of secularism is the separation of church and state. It guarantees freedom of conscience and of worship. Religious violence is rooted in the dogmatism that is inherent in all religions. We must therefore protect people against the violence generated by these religions. Despite its implicit references to the criminal theory of a 'clash of civilisations' and to the blind claims of the Catholic church, this text is a means of demanding religious freedom around the world and the protection of practising individuals against fanaticism. I shall vote in favour, out of compassion and conviction.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) We must vehemently condemn the various attacks against Christian communities throughout the world but, in particular, in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The proliferation of these episodes of intolerance, repression and violent acts directed at communities must concern us all. The authorities of the countries concerned have made every effort to identify the perpetrators of and those responsible for such attacks against Christian communities. Those responsible for these attacks and other acts of violence against Christians must be brought to justice and duly judged.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) The lip service paid by the European Union to religious freedom is not enough. In Islamic countries in particular, Christians are seen as fair game for suppression and, frequently, murder. Despite this shocking situation, the EU, as a lofty community of values, has mostly chosen a policy of polite silence. All in all, it

would seem as if the political elite in Brussels, which is indifferent to Europe's Christian roots, has also forgotten the fate of Christians in Islamic countries. Instead of demanding an end to the persecution of Christians, we take refuge in political correctness, preferring to concern ourselves with the welfare of those Muslims living in the EU, who enjoy a level of religious freedom that most Christians in the Islamic world can only dream of.

In future, the plight of Christians must play a special role in the management of the EU's foreign relations with Islamic countries. The EU has sufficient ways and means to help improve the situation of Christians. For example, development aid and other financial supports should be made conditional on allowing religious freedom for Christians. I have voted accordingly.

Claudio Morganti (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) It was with some determination that I voted today to condemn violence against Christian communities and religious minorities.

Respect for human rights and religious freedom must be a cornerstone of relations with other countries. I have personally experienced the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus, a situation to which Europe has turned a deaf ear, even though Cyprus is a Member State. In occupied Cyprus, most of the churches have been destroyed, the statues of saints have been disfigured, and on Christmas Day, Turkish soldiers prevented the celebration of Mass in two Orthodox churches.

Our freedom, the survival of a culture and a way of life based on the absolute value of the human person and equality of everyone before the state, equal rights for women, democracy and social justice are all in danger today.

Religious intolerance is becoming an increasingly frequent phenomenon in various parts of the world, and the terrible attacks against Christians in Egypt and Iraq over the last few weeks are the latest dangerous challenge posed by fundamentalist terrorism. All of us in Europe need to open our eyes and take action to safeguard freedom of religion.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Recent attacks against Christian communities in Egypt, Nigeria, Iraq and Pakistan have made European intervention necessary, and the EU has strongly condemned the persecutions and mobilised its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. I voted in favour of the resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion because I feel we are, unfortunately, faced with a worldwide attack on Christianity, in which religious violence is being used for political purposes to block growth and development, encourage social hatred and destabilise the system in the countries where these attacks take place. I therefore believe it is important for Europe, the promoter of respect for human rights and civil and democratic freedoms, to strongly condemn these violent attacks, which are putting the world back centuries and cutting off any hope of intercultural dialogue, tolerance, growth and social wellbeing.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE), *in writing.* – (EL) I voted in favour of the resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion. The joint resolution, following the attack against worshippers praying in a Coptic church in Alexandria in Egypt on 1 January 2011 condemns all forms of violence against citizens, regardless of the religious group to which they belong, and expresses its concern at the increasing number of cases of religious aggression. I would remind the House that Greece is particularly sensitive on this issue, having mourned victims of a similar attack against Greek tourists by fanatical Islamists in Cairo in Egypt on 18 April 1996.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – The European Union has repeatedly expressed its commitment to freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and freedom of thought, and has stressed that governments have a duty to guarantee these freedoms all over the world. The development of human rights, democracy and civil liberties is the common base on which the European Union builds its relations with third countries, and it has been provided for by the democracy clause in the agreements between the EU and third countries. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights declares that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; and freedom of thought, conscience and religion applies not only to adherents of religions but also to atheists, agnostics and people without beliefs.

Thus, we condemn the recent attacks on Christian communities in various countries and expresses solidarity with the families of the victims; we express our deep concerns about the proliferation of episodes of intolerance and repression and violent events directed against Christian communities, particularly in the countries of Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Oreste Rossi (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) We are debating the persecution of Christians around the world, but while we are talking about the violence that has taken place in Iraq, Egypt, the Philippines, India and elsewhere, we continue to ignore what has happened closer to home. I am talking about the occupation by the Turkish army in 1974 of around one third of Cypriot territory.

This military occupation is still ongoing. Thirty-eight thousand Turkish soldiers are garrisoned in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and the island is divided in two by walls and fences that even divide towns and villages. Over the years, 520 Christian churches and monasteries have been systematically destroyed and replaced by minarets. The artworks in these churches have been burnt, desecrated or plundered; the cemeteries have been destroyed and Christian bishops are prohibited from holding Mass. On Christmas Day, Turkish police officials prevented Mass being celebrated in Karpasia at the Church of St. Synesios in Rizokarpaso and the Church of the Holy Trinity. However, the most incredible thing is that there are many Members of Parliament who defend Christians around the world, and yet they are in favour of Turkey joining the EU.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) We hear of the persecution of Christians with increasing frequency. The statistics provided by international organisations are appalling – they say that around 150 000 Christians are murdered worldwide every year. We must not be indifferent to such disregard for human life. The European Union, as a guardian of fundamental democratic values and human rights, should maintain better monitoring of the situation in third countries, and in the Middle East in particular. Our efforts should be unequivocal and more resolute. Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right, and religiously motivated discrimination and violence are inconsistent with our values. By respecting these rights, we set an example to other countries, but we should be equally effective in exacting the same respect from others. Human rights are universal and should be respected everywhere, and we should react decisively to any kind of expression of intolerance and, in particular, to religious intolerance. The Union has suitable instruments at its disposal which permit us to force the governments of countries with which we maintain political or commercial relations to act properly and to respect civil liberties, including freedom of religion. In Muslim countries, but also in countries such as China, India and Nepal, churches and chapels are burned with impunity, people are turned out onto the street, tortured or even killed and women are forced to undergo abortions.

In the name of correct economic relations, these things are not brought up at the negotiating table. Europe must not remain silent.

Dominique Vlasto (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I wholeheartedly support this resolution, which strongly condemns the growing number of attacks against Christian communities. We cannot stand for such barbaric acts: they are expressions of hate and intolerance. I condemn the violence and the loss of human life that have plunged numerous families and all Christian communities throughout the world into mourning. To attack these communities is to undermine our most fundamental values. Respect for religious diversity and religious freedom is a universal principle that must be upheld. These attacks, carried out in the name of some extremist obscurantism from another era, are designed to create a climate of fear, and in the end, it is the survival of these ancient communities that is directly under threat. The EU must show solidarity with the victims and must support the authorities, which are committed to pursuing the perpetrators. This demand must be at the heart of our relations with our partners, in the same way as the human rights clauses. Tolerance and peace are intimately linked, and I shall, as always, support the European Union's actions to ensure respect for and the promotion of our values, freedoms and rights throughout the world.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) This joint resolution deserved support because the number of attacks on Christian communities throughout the world grew in 2010. In the European Union, religious freedom and freedom of expression are intrinsic to our European identity. At the same time, Christianity is of key importance in this context, as well as a significant component in European culture. In the EU, Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms govern religious freedom.

Motions for resolutions: (RC-B7-0044/2010)

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) The European Union must use all the firmness required in its relations with Belarus, the last regime in Europe and an anachronistic example of political state violence, which is totally incompatible with minimal western standards of democracy and freedom. In this resolution, Europe is once again adopting a position of firmly condemning the events that occurred during the recent elections, while also renewing its condemnation of what has been happening in Belarus for decades, with censorship of information, the arrest and imprisonment of dissidents, and everything else that a deplorable dictatorship like that of Minsk does every day to keep civil society in check. I am wholeheartedly voting in favour of the joint resolution.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of the resolution on the situation in Belarus. Over 700 persons were detained for their participation in the demonstration on 19 December in Minsk, most of whom have been released after serving short administrative sentences, while 24 opposition activists and journalists, including 6 presidential candidates, have been charged for 'organising mass disorder' accompanied by violent attacks and armed resistance that could carry prison sentences of up to 15 years. We condemn the use of brutal force by the police and KGB services against the protesters on Election Day. Such behaviour represents a severe violation of basic democratic principles, such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, as well as of human rights. Given the current situation in Belarus, I would urge the Commission to continue to provide financial aid to the European Humanities University (EHU) based in Vilnius, Lithuania, to

increase the number of scholarships for Belarusian students, repressed for their civic activities and expelled from universities, and to contribute to assistance for the organisation 'Solidarity with Belarus'.

David Casa (PPE), in writing. – The state of affairs in Belarus has deteriorated over recent months and is now of great concern. It has been shown that the elections that have been carried out in no way satisfy the requirements of free and fair elections in a democracy. The arrest and continued detention of Presidential candidates as well as the violence shown to protesters must be condemned. The EU should do everything within its power to demonstrate that such events will not be taken lightly and possible measures should certainly include the consideration of economic sanctions against Belarus. It is for these reasons that I have decided to support the joint motion for a resolution.

Corina Crețu (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The decision made by the Belarusian authorities to terminate the mission of the OSCE Office is regrettable. They have been requested to rescind this decision immediately.

On the very same lines, action to block several major websites on the day of the elections is deplorable. Current media legislation in Belarus does not comply with international standards and therefore, the Belarusian authorities are called to revise and amend it.

Following an assessment of the political situation in Belarus, a serious violation of democratic rights and regulations has been observed. As a result, we cannot but condemn the acts of repression against peaceful protesters, leaders of the democratic opposition, as well as numerous civil society activists, journalists, teachers and students.

Mário David (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I view the prevailing political and social situation in Belarus with a certain amount of apprehension but, I should say, also with a great deal of hope. That is why I unconditionally support this joint resolution signed by five parliamentary groups, not including the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left. However, as well as expressing my regret about what is happening, which is well described in the resolution, I would like to emphasise the specific measures targeted by this resolution, which I think that both the Council and the Commission should put into practice immediately: the application of economic sanctions; the freezing of all financial aid granted through the International Monetary Fund and also through the European Investment Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; support by all possible means for the efforts of Belarusian civil society with a view to achieving a society with greater freedom and democracy; restoring the ban on awarding visas to the main Belarusian leaders, extending it to top officials; suspension of the participation of Belarus in the activities of the Eastern Partnership at the Eastern Partnership summit to be held in Budapest; and, finally, intensification of the work relating to the directives for negotiating agreements for facilitating visas and readmission, with a view to strengthening contact between populations.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) Belarus is the only country in the world where police are still operating under the name KGB. This simple fact is symbolically illustrative of the type of regime in force there. The citizens of Belarus are demanding and deserve effective changes that will improve their living conditions, effectively promote democracy and allow them full political self-determination. I hope that the democratic countries will realise how incapable the Belarusian regime is of promoting the democratisation of the country and will openly oppose its repressive means and methods.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Based on the preliminary results and conclusions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and of the OSCE/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the presidential elections on 19 December 2010 failed to satisfy the international standards for free, fair and transparent elections. Therefore, new free and democratic elections must be held soon, in accordance with the OSCE standards.

In addition, the brutal use of force by the police and the State Security Agency of the Republic of Belarus against demonstrations on the day of the elections is unacceptable. I must express my serious concerns about the attempts by the Belarusian authorities to place in state custody Danil Sannikov, the three-year-old son of Andrei Sannikov, presidential candidate, and of Irina Khalip, investigative journalist, both held since the elections on 19 December.

All repressive measures must also be condemned and the Belarusian authorities urged to cease immediately all forms of persecution, intimidation and threats against civil activists.

I think that the Council, Commission and the High Representative of the EU must review EU policy relating to Belarus, including the possibility of applying specific economic sanctions and the freezing of all macro-financial aid.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) Irrespective of our analysis of what is happening in Belarus, we cannot be complicit in this blatant attack on the independence and national sovereignty of this country, encouraging direct interference in its internal affairs and manipulating events that only the Belarusians and the authorities of the country are entitled to resolve, in order to try and align the state and its authorities with the interests of the European Union.

This resolution is a parade of unacceptable actions, the objective of which is to install in Minsk a regime that is open to the interests of the EU. Let us look at a couple of examples:

- it calls on the Commission to support, with all financial and political means, the efforts of Belarusian civil society, independent media (including TV Belsat, European Radio for Belarus, Radio Racja and others) and non-governmental organisations in Belarus to promote democracy and oppose the regime;
- it calls on the Commission to develop a mechanism of registration of NGOs that are denied registration in Belarus for political reasons, in order to enable them to benefit from EU programmes.

Therefore, we did not vote in favour of this resolution.

Sandra Kalniete (PPE), *in writing.* – (LV) The European Union must actively declare its position on events in Belarus. We must condemn the violent repression of the opposition and the falsification of the results of the presidential election. Liberty is one of the fundamental values of the European Union, and we can successfully develop cooperation only with those states where these values are respected. That is why release of political prisoners is one of the preconditions for the resumption of dialogue between the European Union and Belarus. With this declaration, the European Parliament must send a clear signal to the government of Belarus that we want cooperation, but that we shall never be prepared to ignore the political freedom of individuals or the falsification of election results for the sake of economic interests, especially because, more than 20 years ago, a significant part of the Members of the European Parliament were fighting for freedom themselves. Sanctions

must be introduced against the Belarusian regime, but they must not impact on the Belarusian people to whom we must open a window to Europe.

European universities must accept those young people from Belarus who are excluded from universities there on account of their political activity and who will never again be able to obtain an education in a Belarus led by Lukashenko. We must consolidate our collaboration with the representatives of civil society in Belarus, support their struggle and share experiences with them. I am convinced that the people of Belarus deserve a democratic state where human rights are respected, where fair elections take place, and where freedom of speech prevails. If the government of Belarus wants cooperation with us, then it will be obliged to respect these conditions.

Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš (PPE), *in writing.* – (LV) A situation in which, on our very doorstep – in Belarus, manifestations of democracy in both political and NGO respects are brutally suppressed is unacceptable. I supported this resolution because I believe that the support of the Western allies is essential for the opposition to the authoritarian regime in Belarus. This is an opportunity for the Union to forge a common foreign policy and defend those values for which it stands as a matter of routine. At the same time, the European Union must introduce sanctions against the authoritarian government of Belarus and give both moral and financial support to the democracy movement in Belarus.

Tunne Kelam (PPE), *in writing.* – I voted for the joint resolution on Belarus, being one of its initiators on behalf of the PPE Group. The resolution addresses in a clear and unambiguous way the tragic situation in Belarus, created by its dictator, Lukashenko, since 19 December 2010. Therefore, I would like to stress paragraph 15, which invites the EU Member States not to weaken EU joint actions with bilateral initiatives that could undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the European approach. Also, I see not holding the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championships in Minsk as being one of the most efficient levers in the proposal for exerting influence on the Belarus authorities to abandon their repressive politics.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The European Union has always considered humanitarian policy and the protection of fundamental human rights to be its priorities. Its vocation, which today allows it to play a leading role on the world stage and export beyond its borders the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and legality, enables us to understand the reasons behind the proposal for a joint resolution aimed at calling on Belarus to respect all the efforts that have been made on matters of international law and human rights. The events that occurred during the elections on 19 December are, sadly, well known. They were characterised by the brutal repression of popular demonstrations complaining about a number of obvious cases of vote rigging, carried out by the police and secret service agents. Such unacceptable events have led the European Parliament, acting on statements made previously by its President, Mr Buzek, to call on the Union to impose heavy sanctions on Belarus and to launch an enquiry by external, impartial authorities to reconstruct what happened and ascertain who was responsible.

Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) The countries of the former socialist bloc understand the political situation in Belarus very well – restrictions on personal freedom and on freedom of the press and the media, and an undemocratic system of government. In view of the recent events in Belarus following the presidential elections, I would like to draw attention to the steps which the European Parliament will take together with the Commission and the Council to intervene in this matter. After all, we must talk

about measures for helping Belarusian democracy and seek effective ways of reconsidering EU policy towards the Lukashenko regime. In the present situation, we must put pressure on Minsk and request the release of political prisoners and cessation of the persecution of journalists. This is why I voted for the adoption of the resolution. Thank you.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – The situation in Belarus is intolerable and I join my colleagues in condemning the use of brutal force by the police and KGB services against the protesters on Election Day, in particular, over a brutal attack on Mr Niakliayeu, among many cases of severe violation of basic democratic principles, such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, as well as of human rights, and express my concern at the attempts of the Belarusian authorities to take into state custody Danil Sannikov, 3-year-old son of the presidential candidate, Andrei Sannikov, and Irina Khalip, an investigative journalist, who have both been jailed since the 19 December election. I join the call for the Commission to support with all financial and political means the efforts of the Belarusian civil society to promote democracy and oppose the regime.

Jiří Maštálka (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (CS) We should not just close the door and thereby reduce the chance for improved dialogue. The introduction of strict sanctions might, through its impact, create a barrier and isolate this country even more. In the final analysis, the greatest impact would, in all probability, be felt by persons other than the ones targeted. Communications between the EU and Belarus should continue intensively, making use of all the possibilities of diplomacy, and reviewed regularly. As far as effectiveness is concerned, it should involve establishing a different kind of dialogue, held in a different form and at different levels, including a balanced, rather than a one-sided, assessment. The cornerstone, however, should be a careful assessment of experience to date in mutual communications between the EU and Belarus, on the basis of which the experience could be incorporated into a strategic plan clearly reflecting EU foreign policy on this country.

This could lead, in the long-term, to improved relations and the start of new cooperation projects, contributing to the further development of this country and preserving its sovereignty. The Eastern Partnership can play a significant role here.

Clemente Mastella (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) A general consensus has emerged from the debate in this Chamber that Europe needs to react strongly to the recent events that took place in Belarus following the presidential elections there.

Personally, I believe a coordinated approach should be adopted: while, on the one hand, Europe wants to put some kind of pressure on the Belarusian Government, on the other, it must not completely cut off cooperation with the Minsk authorities, without thereby endorsing their policy. Such an approach would, in fact, only hurt the people of Belarus. That is why we need to continue to support all the measures that favour civil society and protect the opposition, independent mass media and non-governmental organisations.

It appears, therefore, that the cooperation mechanisms between the European Union and Belarus should not be interrupted at all, since they alone can make a real contribution to the country's wellbeing and to its social and democratic growth. I would therefore argue that the 'critical dialogue' that the 27 Member States of the EU have already put in place should be maintained, in order to convince Belarus that it must strengthen its resolve to move towards European standards in terms of respect for democracy and protection of human rights.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) What is happening in Belarus must be of concern to all those who believe in democracy and the rule of law. The citizens of this country are living under a regime that does not respect human rights and maintains an extremely savage political police force. The EU must support all efforts made leading to the democratisation of this regime and an improvement in the lives of its population. It is necessary to put an end to the repression still in force in Belarus.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) We can only condemn the use of force and violence by the police and the KGB against protesters on election day. Over 600 people were arrested and imprisoned. Arrests, searches and further convictions continued over the next few days. This unacceptable attitude towards the opposition should be of great concern to us. Anyone arrested for political reasons should be released immediately. There must be no further persecution of the opposition, democratic forces, or civil society representatives.

The position taken by the authorities is also puzzling because it runs counter to that adopted during the election campaign, during which we witnessed the emergence of pluralistic forces, the formation of a real opposition and an active civil society. The EU has not recognised the official poll results. Whether or not measures should be taken against the government, these measures must not penalise the people, NGOs or civil society. The Foreign Affairs Council of 31 January 2011 will have to decide on appropriate measures.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) There are comments in the media claiming that the reintroduction of the sanctions against Belarus' President Lukashenko, which were relaxed more than two years ago, would be tantamount to admitting that our longstanding efforts at rapprochement have failed. The fact is that these efforts had failed before now, for example, at the time of the presidential elections and, if not sooner, they had certainly done so by the time the OSCE offices in Minsk were closed and accusations of attempted destabilisation were made against Germany and Poland.

However, in many instances, the resolution exaggerates the issues, making what is basically a good text susceptible to criticism. For example, a call to ban all government officials and representatives of the justice system from entering the EU will not achieve the intended objective. The cancellation of the 2014 World Ice Hockey Championships would be a similar example of excessive megaphone diplomacy. It is for that reason that I have abstained from voting.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE), *in writing.* – (LT) I agree that there should be a fundamental review of EU policy on Belarus at the next Foreign Affairs Council. I believe that not just in the European Parliament and the Commission, but also at ministerial level and the level of Heads of State, constant attention needs to be paid to Belarus and the situation in it, because Belarus is a country that shares a border with the EU. The appointment of EU coordinators for Belarusian affairs might ensure united action by the EU as regards this country. I support the provision that the EU should freeze the visa ban for an extended list of Belarus officials but, at the same time, unlock contacts and travel within the EU for ordinary Belarusians as much as possible. Lithuania is following this route, having signed an agreement on streamlined cross-border movement with Belarus, and issuing free visas to Belarusian citizens. I also support the objective of establishing the 'most sensitive areas' and reaching a decision on the application of targeted sanctions, while directing and adapting EU assistance to Belarusian civil society. I call on the Commission to find ways of increasing access to independent information for the Belarusian

population. The European Humanities University in Vilnius is one of the most successful long-term development cooperation projects as regards Belarus. Faced with such an internal situation in Belarus, where all roads to becoming a critical, conscious and free citizen have long been blocked, the EHU is becoming not just an island of free Belarusian thought, but also a breeding ground for future Belarusian leaders. EU assistance for this university should therefore not only be maintained, but increased. That is logical and something we should welcome.

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The motion for a resolution contains some very excessive demands, such as visa restrictions for state officials and members of the judiciary. There is also an intention to boycott the World Ice Hockey Championships in 2014. Therefore, I have abstained from voting.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Following the presidential elections in Belarus on 19 December 2010, which resulted in the re-election of President Lukashenko, there were protest demonstrations that were violently suppressed by the police. Many demonstrators and opposition leaders were arrested and could face severe sentences. The European Union cannot stand by and watch that happen: we all need to focus our attention on securing the release of those people after what happened following the election. That is one of the reasons why my vote in favour is intended as a gesture of assent for a joint resolution to provide support for Belarus to participate in the process of cooperating with the European Union. In my view, we need to address this issue quickly and practically in a coordinated approach that actively supports civil society and protects the opposition and their families. My vote in favour is based on the need, which is now strongly felt in the EU, to convince Belarus that it must move towards European standards in terms of respect for democracy and protection of human rights.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – With this resolution, Parliament clearly considers – in line with the preliminary conclusions of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and OSCE/ODIHR – that the presidential elections of 19 December 2010 failed to meet international standards of free, fair and transparent elections; considers this vote as yet another missed opportunity for a democratic transition in Belarus; and calls, in the light of numerous and serious irregularities reported by OSCE/ODIHR, for new elections be held under free and democratic conditions, in accordance with OSCE standards.

It also condemns the use of brutal force by the police and KGB services against the protesters on election day and, in particular, expresses its indignation over a brutal attack on Uladzimir Niakliayeu – examples of the severe violation of basic democratic principles such as freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, as well as of human rights, and it expresses its concern at the attempts by the Belarusian authorities to take into state custody Danil Sannikov, three-year-old son of presidential candidate, Andrei Sannikov, and investigative journalist, Irina Khalip, both of whom have been jailed since the 19 December election.

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) The EU's policy on Belarus, a policy of dialogue and an outstretched hand, has proved ineffective. The time has come, therefore, for difficult but determined decisions to be made, which, on the one hand, will mean sanctions against the regime, but which, on the other, will mean openness to Belarusian civil society, because without its support, the changes which are needed will not take place in Belarus. The resolution speaks about this.

Report: Derk Jan Eppink (A7-0374/2010)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I welcome this report, the Commission having reacted to the crisis and, at the same time, applied competition policy measures. I advocate Parliament playing its role as colegislator as regards competition policy and, since this is not possible, I call on the Commission to inform Parliament in detail on the follow-up given to its recommendations and to justify any deviations from them. It is regrettable that it has still not been possible to improve the competition framework within the single market to make it more favourable for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution on the Report on Competition Policy 2009. I agree with the rapporteur's opinion that Parliament should have a more active role in the shaping of competition policy through the introduction of a colegislative role. In order to achieve this objective, Parliament must be informed regularly of any initiatives in this field. I have no doubt that Parliament's active role in the shaping of EU competition policy will be a significant contribution to the successful implementation of competition policy and the unrestricted functioning of the internal market, which are essential preconditions for sustainable economic growth in the European Union.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) One of the principles of the Treaty on European Union stipulates that Member States must adopt an economic policy 'in accordance with the principles of the open market economy, based on fair competition'. The purpose of the competition policy is to create genuine competition on the single market using measures relating to the market's structures and the behaviour of its actors. Free competition fosters innovation, reduces production costs, increases economic efficiency and, consequently, boosts the level of the European economy's competitiveness. The report covers both antitrust policies and State aid control policies. It also features rules and procedures for combating anti-competitive behaviour in companies and prevents governments from granting State aid which distorts competition in the internal market.

I voted for this report as I regard competition policy as a key instrument enabling the European Union to have a dynamic, efficient and innovative internal market, to be globally competitive, as well as emerge from the financial crisis. Consumers gain most when competition policy is applied effectively.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) Every year, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Competition publishes its report on EU competition policy. The European Commission is equipped with very broad powers in this area so that it can ensure the proper functioning of the internal market. The year 2009 was marked by tough crisis conditions, which the European Commission had to take into account when supervising the practices of undertakings. I voted in favour of Parliament's resolution because it appeals to the European Commission to ensure that MEPs are more involved in the decision-making process concerning this policy, that more consideration is given to services of general interest, and that its services pay more attention to the activities of undertakings in the financial sector.

Jean-Luc Bennahmias (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) Had there been an electronic vote on the Report on Competition Policy 2009, I would have abstained. Indeed, there were some good things in this report (assessment of competition policy, consumer rights, innovation and a greater role for SMEs), but I deplore the general angle from which it was written: a kind of suspicion in relation to State aid – which is presumed to conflict *a priori* with

competition policy – and a way of advocating the early liberalisation of certain sectors of the economy, particularly the rail sector, which seems to me inappropriate.

We need to change that angle and place the citizens back at the heart of the problem. We can see, particularly for public services, that rules on State aid are inadequate to the tasks performed by a public service and should therefore be rewritten, considering citizens' needs and social cohesion above all else.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this report on the Report on Competition Policy 2009. The European Commission was quick to react to the economic and financial crisis, and competition policy measures were adapted effectively. I would like to draw attention to the fact that Parliament should participate more actively in the shaping of competition policy through the introduction of a colegislative role. Furthermore, Parliament must be informed regularly of any initiatives in this field. An EU competition policy based on the principles of open markets and a level playing field in all sectors is a cornerstone of a successful internal market and a precondition for the creation of sustainable and knowledge-based jobs. I would like to stress the need to draft clear competition rules that are helpful and useful for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), because the successful implementation of competition policy and the unrestricted functioning of the internal market are essential preconditions for sustainable economic growth in the European Union. I would urge the Commission to focus more on ensuring fair competition within the internal market, and a level playing field with regard to exit conditions.

David Casa (PPE), *in writing.* – It is crucial to note that due to the exceptional circumstances that have been witnessed because of the financial crisis, a degree of flexibility has necessarily had to be exercised in the context of EU competition policy. Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand that the principles upon which the policy is based are those of open markets and the ensuring of a level playing field. These are essential conditions for a successful internal market. It is my opinion that this report has adequately tackled the issues of concern that have arisen as a result of the crisis. The report has also been successful in setting out the best way forward. I have therefore decided to vote in favour of the report.

Corina Crețu (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) The Report on Competition Policy is an important document, emphasising that in times of crisis, it is essential not only to ensure financial stability and re-establish credit flows, but we must also guarantee, in particular, that all the conditions and verification and control mechanisms are in place for the markets to operate efficiently.

On the other hand, in such circumstances, competition rules must be applied flexibly when necessary, without compromising on the principles which the policies in this area are based on. We must not forget that during the crisis, quite a few voices have been heard calling for the introduction of protectionist policies, which would only serve to deepen and prolong the crisis.

Competition policy is a key instrument enabling the EU to have a dynamic, efficient and innovative internal market, which is globally competitive. This is why the observations and recommendations made by the report on sector policies in this area are welcome, as are those concerning the scope and destination of State aid.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) EU competition policy is not just a fundamental policy that truly underpins the European legal framework, but it also constitutes the basis of a successful internal market and a sustainable and competitive economy. That is why I

consider it important that the Commission informs Parliament on its development and application. As we are all aware, 2009 was an extraordinary year for a variety of reasons. It was the year that followed the collapse of Lehman Brothers (September 2008), which meant that various exceptional measures were introduced with regard to competition, in particular, concerning State aid, the four communications relating to the financial sector and the provisional framework directed at the remaining sectors. Therefore, I consider it essential to carry out an in-depth analysis on the impact that these measures have had on the economy and finances of the various states and to examine their effectiveness so that the necessary conclusions can be drawn.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This resolution is on 2009 competition policy and contains a global perspective of all state support of the transport sector within the EU, which is fundamental for the existence of a market without borders and for the free movement of people, goods and services.

The economic crisis of the last few years is reflected in the bankruptcy of many businesses and it is imperative to adopt regulatory measures that prevent the distortion of this activity, namely, by regulating support to the sector. Moreover, the peripheral countries of the EU have seen increased costs in this field, when funds to minimise this situation have been necessary.

Therefore, I welcome the adoption of this resolution and welcome the creation of a set of market monitoring measures, the environmental concern about CO₂ emissions, and the incentivisation of research into ways to improve competitiveness in Europe, namely, through the recommendation that the Commission and the Member States should provide 3% investment in this area.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) It is unacceptable that, at a time when the financial and economic crisis is deepening, the European Parliament should approve a report on Competition Policy 2009 that defends competition and insists on new liberalisation measures, particularly in the railway sector, when it states that it is necessary to complete the single railway market by opening up national passenger transport markets. The same occurs in connection with the pharmaceutical sector, when it asks the Commission to expedite the completion of the internal market in medicines, as well as in telecommunications, etc.

What we have, then, is a report that intends to expand liberalisation in basic sectors in order to improve people's living conditions, but without thinking about the effects on employment, prices and people's lives. It is only interested in the profits of the economic and financial groups, even if it occasionally refers to small and medium-sized enterprises, which the neoliberal policy of the European Union is putting in jeopardy. It always overlooks the fact that this so-called free competition merely allows large companies to crush small ones, when those suffering the consequences are workers, consumers and small entrepreneurs.

Therefore, we voted against the report.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution, because protectionism and non-enforcement of competition rules would only deepen and prolong the crisis. Competition policy is an essential tool to enable the EU to have a dynamic, efficient and innovative internal market and to be competitive on the global stage, as well as to overcome the financial crisis. Competition is still imperfect in the energy sector,

agricultural production and other sectors, and Parliament should therefore participate more actively in the shaping of competition policy through the introduction of a colegislative role. Parliament's active role in the shaping of EU competition policy will be a significant contribution to the successful implementation of competition policy and the functioning of the internal market, which are essential preconditions and premises for sustainable economic growth in the European Union.

Iliana Ivanova (PPE), *in writing*. – (BG) On the issue of the report on competition policy for 2009, I would like to reiterate the importance of the follow-up actions to assess the effectiveness of the State aid provided. It is vital for the European single market that the Commission conduct an in-depth analysis of the consequences of the review of the state assistance mechanism carried out in response to the crisis, and with regard to healthy competition and ensuring a level playing field in the EU, financial reform and job creation.

We must not forget that the process of reviewing the mechanisms for providing state assistance was initiated for one purpose only: to help the Member States' economies recover from the crisis. By monitoring the outcomes of the provision of state assistance, the Commission must satisfy itself that the measures taken do not exceed the initial aim, because the essence of EU competition policy is equal participation in the single market.

Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) We have voted on a crucially important document on EU competition policy. Competition is essential for the healthy functioning of the economy. Competition should be looked at worldwide as well as inside the Union. In the worldwide approach, we have to concentrate, among other things, on the rules of play in the market, and also at the cost side of competitive producers from outside the European Union. This concerns Chinese and Korean producers in particular. I welcome the call for completion of the single railway market throughout Europe. Healthy principles of competition can contribute to revitalisation of the railways and increase their share of the transport market. This may bring us closer to the idea of a European railway system, similar to the road or aviation system.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The year 2009 was a difficult year for the European Union, marked by the especially serious financial and economic crisis, and it was not alone in this. The negative effects of this crisis hit the economy and business environment hard, as well as decision makers. While decision makers have tried to draw up policies that will minimise the impact of the crisis on the real economy, the European Commission, together with Member States and central banks, has worked hard to stabilise the financial system. This year's report pays particular attention to these issues and notes with satisfaction the rapid response from the Commission and its successful application of competition policy measures. I voted in favour of this report as I think that the European Union needs a strong competition policy, founded on the principle of a free market and fair competition in all sectors, which will generate a successful internal market and will favour the creation of sustainable, knowledge-based jobs.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this Report and particularly want to draw attention to paragraph 105 which calls on the Commission to seek the completion of the single railway market. A call I strongly endorse.

Clemente Mastella (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of this report because, based on a positive evaluation of the action taken by the European Commission again this year, it strongly supports a more active role for Parliament in the shaping of competition policy. We are therefore asking for a 'colegislative' role and for Parliament to be regularly informed

of any initiatives in this field. We wish to emphasise that an EU competition policy based on the principles of open markets and a level playing field in all sectors is a cornerstone of a successful internal market and a precondition for the creation of sustainable jobs. We therefore underline our call for greater consistency between all EU policies and the priorities set out in the EU 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. It is necessary to draft clearer competition rules that encourage the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are a driver of growth in all our economies. At the same time, we call on the Member States to cooperate actively with the Commission in developing and evaluating the temporary rules established in response to the financial and economic crisis by providing accurate, detailed reports on their implementation and effectiveness.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (FR) This report is an ode to the free and undistorted competition that it holds up as an infallible remedy against the financial crisis. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Competition is the disease, not the cure. This report is an absurd credo. I shall vote against it.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The analysis of the report on 2009 competition policy shows that the economic crisis, which started in 2008, may have had some effect on this very policy, not least because the Member States have provided aid to their respective economies in different ways. It is time to analyse the consequences of this aid for the internal market and interpret whether it has distorted free competition. We cannot forget that EU competition policy is based on open-market principles and on an activity plan that is equitable in all sectors; this constitutes the foundation of a successful internal market and a precondition for the creation of sustainable, knowledge-based jobs.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The financial and economic crisis that has rocked the financial markets has naturally also impacted on competition policy. This impact is apparent in the growing budgetary deficits and increasing public debt in many Member States, slowing down economic recovery, and also in the state supports provided in response to the financial crisis.

The government guarantees have led to a variety of effects and distortions, such as a reduction in the spread of private loans, as well as an impact on the strategy followed by the pension funds. European policy on competition should make the internal market competitive on a global level. There is little doubt that a coordinated approach in this area makes sense. However, it should not degenerate into an attack on sovereignty. For this reason, I have voted against the report.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Eppink's report on competition policy 2009 because competition policy is an essential tool for tackling the effects of the economic crisis. In terms of competition for 2009, following the recovery of the financial sector, the Commission carried out – as it is still doing – the essential task of supervising the banks' repayment of the State aid disbursed to revitalise the economy. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need to be supported first of all. Since SMEs have a crucial role to play for the European economy as a whole on account of their great innovation potential, they need clear, fair and non-discriminatory competition rules in order to facilitate cross-border transactions and to take advantage of the EU market by making effective use of SEPA (the Single Euro Payments Area).

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – We have supported globally the proposed report, although we lost some important votes regarding ecological taxation.

However, in general terms, the text was good enough to be supported by us at the end (with no enthusiasm, that is true).

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) It is becoming increasingly obvious, including in the light of the Commission's 2009 Report on Competition Policy in Europe, that competition policy is an essential tool that will help the European Union to have a dynamic, efficient and innovative internal market and to be competitive on the global stage, as well as to overcome the financial crisis.

In this context, the European Parliament must have a more active role, starting by increasing its involvement in any of the Commission's initiatives in this field, as the Commission is the sole EU-wide competent competition authority. The report points out that small and medium-sized enterprises are particularly important for the whole European economy, stresses the major innovation potential of small and medium-sized enterprises, and reiterates its previous request to the Commission to adopt new initiatives with a focus on fair and non-discriminatory competition conditions for such companies.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) We want the internal market to be effective, dynamic and innovative. Competition policy is the right tool for achieving these objectives. A priority for the next period is to ensure lasting growth by increasing employment levels, which will result in a strengthening of our competitiveness. This will contribute to an improvement in the Union's world position and allow us to overcome the crisis but, above all, it will raise our citizens' quality of life. If competition is operating properly in the market for goods and services, we can guarantee better quality, lower prices and greater choice for the consumer. In particular, we must remember small and medium-sized enterprises, which not only provide jobs for most of our citizens, but also possess huge potential for innovation. Therefore, it is very important to create fair and non-discriminatory conditions for them to operate, and to develop very clear and transparent rules of competition. The Commission's effective use of the instruments of competition policy allowed stabilisation of the economy and moderation of the effects of the economic crisis on businesses and consumers. The year 2009 was one in which help was essential in order to maintain the integrity and competitiveness of the single market. The policy of State aid is a crucial element of competition policy, because it allows equal opportunities to be guaranteed to all businesspeople operating in the single market. However, that aid should be monitored, so that it does not impair the working of the market.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The analysis of the report on Competition Policy prepared by the European Commission relating to 2009 allows us to draw conclusions concerning the advantages of this European policy. The European free competition policy is one of the key policies of European integration. The underlying concept aims to establish an internal market where its economic players can freely initiate and exercise their activities. As stated in this document, I believe that it is necessary to have clear competition rules so that the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is a real possibility. At present, the European Union is passing through one of the most serious periods of economic and financial crisis in its entire history and the activity of SMEs is vital for re-booting the economy. I am pleased to see the development of greater synergies between competition policy and consumer protection policy. However, I regret that there is still unfair competition in the energy market and I support the invitation made to the European Commission in the document put to the vote today to monitor closely the implementation by the Member States of the third energy liberalisation package.

Derek Vaughan (S&D), *in writing.* – I fully support the calls in this resolution for stronger rules in the area of competition policy. Compensation for individuals and firms where infringements of EU anti-trust law have taken place will go a long way to dissuading companies and individuals from breaching these laws. This proposal is well balanced and calls for a wide range of instruments to be developed to deter people from breaching the rules, including individual liability, transparency and accountability of firms, the right of defence and due process. I am glad that the proposal has not gone as far as the US where the level of fines has led to excessive damages being awarded, resulting in some job losses.

Report: Michael Gahler (A7-0377/2010)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this report, taking into account the fact that three EU Member States are members of the Arctic Council, while Iceland is in membership negotiations. The EU plays an important role in this region and already has shared competences in a number of areas, as well as exclusive ones such as fisheries. In addition, the EU plays a leading role on certain policies, such as environmental and climate-change research. In addition to this situation, it is necessary to take into account the fact that some Arctic partners are already major suppliers of energy, raw materials and fish to Europe. Their variety of resources and potential for alternative sources of energy can only be developed through an eco-systematic approach and with integrated management plans. Also, the development of new trade routes may benefit the European economy, given the privileged position of Europe to supply services, such as Global Positioning System coverage using the Galileo system.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution on a sustainable EU policy for the High North. I agree that there is a need for a united, coordinated EU policy on the Arctic region, in which both the EU's priorities and the potential challenges and a strategy are clearly defined, taking into account Arctic renewable and non-renewable resources, the impact of climate change on the region and the different geopolitical appreciation of the Arctic on a larger scale. The Arctic is a sensitive region where the effects of climate change are especially visible, having serious repercussions on other regions in the world. Therefore, the best protection for the Arctic is a long-term and ambitious global climate agreement, but the rapid warming of the Arctic makes it necessary, in addition, to work on possible further short-term measures to limit Arctic warming. This is particularly important given the increasing interest in the exploitation of resources. We also must not forget the indigenous peoples whose economies rely, to a significant extent, on sustainable use of natural resources and therefore, the reduction of climate change and its effects and the right of the indigenous peoples to an unpolluted natural environment are also questions of human rights.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) It is estimated that about a fifth of the world's undiscovered hydrocarbon resources are located in the Arctic region. This region is also a very important route for world maritime transport. The availability and safety of these transport routes are therefore of the utmost importance. The Union may not have a coastline on this sea, but Europeans are, of course, greatly affected by what goes on in the Arctic. That is why I voted in favour of this resolution, which endorses a strategy for the High North. The Union must play its role as a world power by asserting both its interests in the region and the need for good global governance of natural resources and of the environmental challenges that are certain to arise. On this occasion, an explicit reference has been made to the role that Iceland's accession might play in this area.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of the report on a sustainable EU policy for the High North, because climate change is the main driver of change in the Arctic as elsewhere. It is commonly agreed that the Arctic is a region that is affected earlier and more heavily by climate change and pollution originating in the industrialised or developing parts of the world. This question needs to be dealt with on a global level, since its causes lie outside the Arctic and, in turn, will also affect the whole globe. The EU is already a frontrunner in research and in environmental and climate change policies in the international context and will continue to be so. Having said this, and recalling the contribution already made today by the EU and its Member States as regards research, funding, its impact through EU legislation on the environment, climate, fisheries, etc., as well as the possibilities for cooperation in the future on issues such as the development of mapping and maritime safety, economic development and the like, it can be concluded that the EU has a lot to contribute to the sustainable development of the Arctic. This region will be of major importance to a world adapting to climate change, facing a growing population and a scarcity of resources.

Corina Creţu (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) The effects of climate change have a greater impact on the Arctic region than any other region. We must combat the consequences of changes affecting areas ranging from the environment and climate to the geopolitics of shipping routes and the supply security of resources.

Since the growth of new economies is resulting in an increasing need for resources, energy and minerals, the EU has a natural interest in ensuring the supply security of the resources and energy needed for the population and industries of Europe.

With regard to the geopolitical picture, this will change considerably if Iceland's EU accession negotiations prove successful. Iceland's accession would also strengthen the EU's presence in the region.

The EU can make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of the Arctic, a region which will be of major importance to a world adapting to climate change, facing a growing population and scarcity of resources.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Three Member States – Denmark, Sweden and Finland – are part of the Arctic Council, at which the EU is an observer. Bearing in mind that 40% of the world's sea trade is conducted by Member States of the EU, it is essential to guarantee the safety of the new world routes through the Arctic, particularly for the Member States of the EU. Like the author of this report, I believe that cooperation to protect the fragile environment of the Arctic, the interests of its inhabitants and the development of the region is very welcome.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) In the present context of prioritising the fight against climate change, the defence and promotion of the Arctic region is of crucial importance, not only in environmental terms, but also in terms of economic development, and of global stability and security. Its potential in terms of renewable energy supplies and fish is particularly important, meaning that the sustainable exploitation of the natural resources of this region is crucial.

However, we must not fail to give sufficient weight to the interests of this region's indigenous peoples in this process. In this respect, the European Union can and must take on a major role in protecting the culture, language, customs and living conditions of these indigenous communities. Without this, any strategy of intervention to safeguard an extremely important

region for the future of the world's population and the planet will be at risk. I would stress the importance of guaranteeing the best conditions for scientific research.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution on a sustainable EU policy for the High North. The Arctic region is attracting more and more attention, due to the effects of climate change, the main trigger of developments. Europe does not only bear a certain responsibility, being one of the main contributors to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, but also has a particular interest in the Arctic, since it will have to deal with the consequences of the changes taking place there, from environmental and climate change issues to the geopolitics of shipping routes and security of supply of resources. It is essential to formulate EU policy as regards the Arctic region with very specific and comprehensive proposals: from the inclusion of local inhabitants in the dialogue and stability and security in the region to the environmental and climate change dimensions of future projects. The indigenous peoples have a right to an unpolluted natural environment.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) The region of the Arctic Ocean is assuming ever greater significance, not just for the continent of Europe, but for the whole world. The climate change taking place in the far north is going to have colossal significance for all of humanity. It is absolutely essential to concentrate efforts on scientific research and to develop a plan for tackling these changes. The Arctic is also an area of resources, such as hydrocarbons, and of the potential for obtaining renewable energy such as wind or water power.

Another economically important resource are fish, which are of fundamental significance in the context of food security. Neither can we forget about the maritime transport routes, which facilitate international trade and enable many enterprises to perform better. In all these areas, the European Union can, and should, make a contribution, helping in the development of the region and setting new standards in striving to protect our planet's environment.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing.* – (DE) The High North is rich in resources and energy and will open up new sea routes that could be used by the European Union. The mineral resources present there are valuable and must also be treated as such. When extracting raw materials, it is important that the ecological system is not too badly affected. The indigenous peoples also need special protection and consideration. The Arctic is a world heritage site and must also be regarded as such. Therefore, our focus should be on the preservation of this heritage, not the extraction of resources. I support the report on a sustainable EU policy for the High North by my fellow Member, Mr Gahler.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) As the Gahler report states, 'the challenges facing the Arctic are global and should therefore include all relevant actors'. The issue of the Arctic region now requires our constant attention more than ever, because of the worrying problems caused by the effects of climate change. The Arctic is, geopolitically, a very important region, containing an estimated one fifth of the world's undiscovered hydrocarbon resources. The fact that three EU Member States – Denmark, Finland and Sweden – are Arctic countries accounts for the Union's interest in ensuring that environmental factors are henceforth taken far more into account than they are at present. The Union has always fought for the environment and has made great efforts to protect it through preventive measures. With the outcome of today's vote in this House, it is once again strongly confirming its position.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I welcome the suggestion of an EU policy for the High North, but any such policy must be conscious of the need to protect the fragile environment of the Arctic and underline the importance of overall stability and peace in the region. It should stress that the EU should pursue policies that ensure that measures to address environmental concerns take into account the interests of the inhabitants of the Arctic region, including its indigenous peoples, in protecting and developing the region. It should also stress the similarity in approach, analysis and priorities between the Commission Communication and policy documents in the Arctic States and the need to engage in policies that respect the interest in sustainable management and use of the land-based and marine, non-renewable and renewable natural resources of the Arctic region, which, in turn, provide important resources for Europe and are a major source of income to the inhabitants of the region.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the report on a sustainable EU policy for the High North, which stresses the need to develop a dialogue with indigenous Arctic communities in order to gain more understanding of their living conditions and culture. This idea, which is repeated many times in the text, is crucial. The European Union's interests must reflect the indigenous peoples' interests to protect and develop the Arctic region. We call for specific measures to preserve the culture, language and customs of these peoples, something which requires a regular dialogue between their representatives and the EU institutions. We call for the European Commission to safeguard the interests of the indigenous peoples when it negotiates trade agreements. Thus, I deplore the European regulation on the ban on seal products, which goes against the interests – in terms of sustainable management of resources – culture and customs of Arctic communities. This regulation, which has rightly been challenged by Canada and Norway, undermines the European Union's interests in the Arctic region and should, in my view, be withdrawn.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (FR) This report advocates the sustainable exploitation of the Arctic but relieves the oil and gas companies of any responsibility in this regard. It disregards environmentalists' comments on the looting that is taking place in this region, which is vital to mankind's survival. Worse still, at no point does it consider limiting investment in the exploitation of non-renewable resources in the High North for the benefit of research in renewable energy. This report validates environmental crime. I shall vote against it.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The relationship that exists between the EU and the Arctic is beyond doubt, since Denmark, Finland and Sweden are arctic countries and both Finland and Sweden are partly located in the Arctic Circle. In view of the contribution of the EU and of its Member States to research and finance, of its impact through EU legislation on the environment, climate, fishing and similar issues, and also of the possibilities for cooperation in the future on matters such as the development of maritime safety and mapping, economic development and similar issues, it can be concluded that the EU has a major contribution to make to the sustainable development of the Arctic. This region will be crucial to a world that has to adapt to face climate change, a rising population and a shortage of resources.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) The Arctic region is attracting more and more attention due to the effects of climate change, the main factor in its evolution. The European Union contributes significantly to climate change and must therefore play a leading role in the fight against this phenomenon. Due to the growing need for natural resources, particularly in the EU, the Arctic represents an important and varied opportunity in terms

of energy supply (gas, renewables), raw materials and fish. The EU must engage in policies that take into account the sustainable management and exploitation of natural resources in the region in terms of the environment, safety and organisation. Iceland's application for EU membership highlights the need to establish a policy for the Arctic, coordinated at European level. The European Union is responsible for striking the right balance between environmental concerns and the race to exploit natural resources, and for taking into account the interests of the people living in the Arctic region.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The Arctic's untold mineral resources have made the area the subject of heated dispute. It is estimated that 90 billion barrels of oil alone lie untapped under the ice. Inevitably, there is a feeling of unease that BP of all companies, having caused the oil catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico last year, is now to be allowed to extract resources in this sensitive natural environment, where conditions are far more extreme than in the Gulf. After all, the fact is that the Arctic region already provides the final resting place for the world's mercury emissions. In view of global warming and the expected consequences, this is a problem that cannot be overestimated. I have voted in favour of the report, because it adequately presents the many factors involved.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The climate change that has affected the Arctic region in recent years highlights the responsibility that the European Union should accept for such an important and urgent situation. These effects are greater in the Arctic than in other regions, and sea-level rise and climate change are nothing but a consequence of the greenhouse gases that the EU is constantly emitting. I believe my vote in favour of a sustainable policy for the High North is of crucial importance, in that the region needs to be safeguarded and protected since it has had to face disastrous environmental impacts that do not depend directly on its own territory but on the more industrialised European countries. The problem needs to be tackled at a global level, therefore, because its causes lie outside the Arctic but, in turn, have an effect on the whole planet. In addition, the region has vast natural resources of energy sources and minerals, and the EU has an interest in ensuring the security of the supplies needed for Europe's people and industries. The Arctic is therefore a major contributor of energy, raw materials and also fish for Europe.

Teresa Riera Madurell (S&D), *in writing.* – (ES) The Parliamentary report on the High North adopted today constitutes an important step forward in setting the guidelines for European policy on the Arctic region. Climate change and the resulting melting of the ice caps are causing changes to the region and the focus of the Arctic states, which have worked swiftly to define strategies for tackling the possibilities that are arising. More specifically, the melting of the ice caps is opening up new opportunities in the creation of new navigation routes and the exploitation of natural resources. I have supported this report as it highlights the responsibility of the EU in the climate change process that is changing the physiognomy of the Arctic, as well as the need to take appropriate action to mitigate this process.

Similarly, the report recognises the legitimate interest of the EU to play a role on the new stage and stresses the imperative to take advantage of the opportunities that arise through supporting sustainable development in the area by its inhabitants, particularly the indigenous communities. It is also important to note that the report signals the need to comply with international law with regard to any action taken in the Arctic first of all, and secondly, to pursue a cooperative approach in the governance of the region.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – The Arctic region is attracting more and more attention, due to the effects of climate change, the main trigger of developments.

Its effects are on a larger scale than in other regions of the world. At the same time, those changes are affecting other regions of the world, through rising sea levels, on the one hand, and consequences for adjacent regional climates, on the other. Thus, Europe does not only bear a certain responsibility, being one of the main contributors to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, but also has a particular interest in the Arctic, since it will have to deal with the consequences of the changes taking place there from environmental and climate-change issues to the geopolitics of shipping routes and security of supply of resources.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I supported this agreement because climate change and pollution originating in the industrialised parts of the world have unfortunately also reached the Arctic for some time now. This area is often described as pristine, but unfortunately, this has not been the case for many years. Unlike the Antarctic, the Arctic is inhabited and traditionally, its natural resources are exploited to the detriment of the environment.

In 1996, in an attempt to curb the phenomenon, the Arctic Council was established to protect the environment in this region. Its members include three EU Member States – Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Emerging economies will increasingly need the resources which are to be found in plentiful supply in the Arctic. Energy, minerals, fish, gas, oil, wind and wave energy are all abundantly available in the region, which makes it vulnerable to speculation.

Report: Traian Ungureanu (A7-0378/2010)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am voting for this report on an EU strategy for the Black Sea. I am doing so, firstly, because of the Commission proposal to develop the strategy for establishing measurable objectives and sectoral partnerships to facilitate joint projects, among other important measures. My second reason is that the rapporteur presents the need for an up-to-date assessment of EU activity in the Black Sea region. My last reason is because there is considerable fragmentation in funding for this strategy, as it is financed by various instruments. To put an end to this fragmentation, it is proposed that this strategy has its own line of finance.

I also agree with the recommendations tabled in this report with a view to developing a stronger political framework, including an integrated approach to this region for the EU, which must be reinforced with the implementation of a specific action plan, and with adequate human and financial resources.

Laima Liucija Andrikienė (PPE), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution on an EU strategy for the Black Sea. I agree with the rapporteur's opinion that given the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the EU and the rather limited results of the Black Sea Synergy, a strategy should be launched to enhance the coherence and visibility of EU action in the region and that the EU Black Sea strategy should be an integral part of the EU's broader foreign and security policy vision. Three years after devising the Black Sea Synergy, an analysis of the current situation indicates, first of all, the lack of a clear, comprehensive and updated picture on the implementation results of the Black Sea Synergy. Therefore, the EU strategy for the Black Sea should put in place a stronger policy framework and boost EU involvement in the Black Sea region. I support the opinion that the main objectives of a Black Sea strategy should entail building a space of peace, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region, while also ensuring EU energy security. As a consequence, security, good governance, energy, transport, environment, socio-economic and human development should be considered as priority actions. It is very important for a security

dimension of the Black Sea to include resolute actions for strengthening democratic rule, good governance and State capacity building.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) For some 50 years now, the European Union has brought peace and stability to the peoples of Western Europe. Nevertheless, we must not forget that our neighbouring countries continue to be plagued by serious unrest. The Union must be sensitive to this situation and must give fresh impetus to its strategy for the Black Sea region. This resolution provides such a response, and I therefore voted in favour of it. It creates a new budget line, which will give priority to the financing of small-scale development projects and cross-border cooperation, and strengthens human resources. An ‘early-warning system’ will act as a conflict prevention and confidence building tool in the region by anticipating any escalation of violence. The resolution draws attention, lastly, to the extended lease for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet in Crimea and the concerns that it raises.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of the report on an EU strategy for the Black Sea. The strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the EU was recognised in 2007, in the context of Romania’s and Bulgaria’s accession to the EU. As developments in this region, strategically situated at the junction of Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, started having a direct impact on EU internal affairs, the EU acknowledged the need to reflect upon its stronger involvement in the area. This resulted in the launch of a new EU policy approach towards the region, called the Black Sea Synergy. The aim of the Black Sea Synergy is to develop regional cooperation between the EU and the region, as well as within the region. However, much less was achieved in the field of implementation, while sectors such as stability, democracy and good governance seem to have witnessed less progress in a context of deterioration of the democratic rule in several Black Sea states and of the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. Furthermore, the region continues to face the following challenges: protracted conflicts, trends towards militarisation and proliferation of arms, maritime surveillance, illicit trafficking and cross-border crime. I believe that in order to achieve efficient implementation, it is necessary to devise mechanisms for regular reporting, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up. In addition, the main objectives of a Black Sea strategy should entail building a space of peace, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region, while also ensuring EU energy security. As a consequence, security, good governance, energy, transport, environmental, socio-economic and human development should be considered as priority actions.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing.* – (CS) I voted in favour of the Ungureanu report, because I firmly believe that the EU urgently needs a cohesive and visible strategy for the Black Sea region. The strategy should be closely linked to the European Neighbourhood Policy, the development of which was given a major boost by the Czech Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2009. The key priority of the EU’s Black Sea strategy should be to secure energy supplies to the EU, and related support for energy projects which are in the interests of the EU and which focus on diversifying gas supplies to the EU. The establishment of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly is also important and urgently required as regards the EU’s energy security.

Among the projects which the Black Sea strategy should be helping to implement, I would include the Nabucco project, the South Stream project, the project to bring liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe and the development of LNG terminals in Black Sea harbours, and also the pan-European Constanta-Trieste oil pipeline. The Commission should not delay and should conclude agreements by the end of 2011 with potential supplier countries for the Nabucco pipeline. The package of measures for energy infrastructure, which the

Commission intends to submit in the near future, should place particular emphasis on the previously mentioned energy projects in the Black Sea region. Last but not least, it is necessary to emphasise the considerable potential of renewable energy sources in the Black Sea region, which may contribute significantly to the future energy security of the EU and the entire world.

Mário David (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The Black Sea is partially surrounded by EU territory and is mainly European geographically. Moreover, in spite of the 2007 Commission Communication entitled *Black Sea Synergy – A new regional cooperation initiative*, measures were taken soon after that time with a view to implementing an effective strategy for the future of the Black Sea.

Therefore, I welcome the initiative and adoption of this report, which I strongly support, in the hope that the recommendations just adopted by the European Parliament will be accepted by the Commission, the Council and our neighbours to the east with whom we share administration of the Black Sea, namely, those relating to frozen conflicts, to closed borders and/or ineffective borders controls, to the transportation of energy, and to security and defence. Only if these issues are resolved will it be possible to achieve the two main objectives proposed by the report: 1) peace, democracy, stability and prosperity in the region; and 2) energy security for the EU.

Diane Dodds (NI), in writing. – I welcome this motion and the parallel report currently with the Fisheries Committee. Both reports refer to the 'Black Sea Synergy'. In the context of south-east Europe, the definition of synergy is one where it represents the ability of a group to outperform even its best individual member. Apparently, there is a consensus amongst some in this place that the best individual member of the Black Sea Synergy is the EU. I would caution against this belief, certainly with regard to fisheries. The common fisheries policy has failed. I would say to my colleagues from the Black Sea region: learn from the mistakes of the CFP, examine the consequences the present regime has had on the small-scale fisheries of the north-east Atlantic and ask is this what we want for the Black Sea? The Black Sea strategy must be based on the uniqueness of the area. As we have seen, ideas that fit one part of Europe will not work in another part.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The conflict that embroiled Russia and Georgia demonstrates the potential instability affecting the Black Sea region, fully justifying the adoption by the European Union of a strategy to deal with the specific challenges presented by that particular part of the world. Notwithstanding the tension that still exists, this is also a region that can have a more stable and balanced future, and the Union can play an important part in this stabilisation process. In this respect, it is necessary not only to establish objectives but, above all, to provide those responsible for implementing the European strategy with the human, technical and financial resources needed to allow them to do their job in the best possible way. Given their geographical situation, history and specific knowledge of the region, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece could make a valuable contribution to ensuring that the strategy to be devised is capable of achieving the objectives of promoting peace, security, democracy, good governance and economic, social and human development.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The importance of the Black Sea to the European Union is well known, as are the problems of instability that affect this region. In a context that includes EU Member States – Bulgaria, Greece and Romania – together with Turkey and various states of the former Soviet bloc, including Russia, the Black Sea is

crucial to energy supply and the diversification of gas distribution. It is a strategic bridge that links Europe with the area of the Caspian Sea, Central Asia and the Middle East, as well as Southeast Asia and China. Among the many differences and rivalries, the close historical and cultural ties are particularly important, as are inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. In this context, greater commitment from the EU is required, along with increased efficiency in formulating measures to assist the stabilisation and revitalisation of this region in a process that must involve all the countries concerned.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Nothing new emerges from this report. The strategies and objectives are the same as those that have formed the so-called external policy of the EU for a long time: controlling the natural resources of the region, in particular, oil and natural gas, on which the EU is dependent, securing their supply without problems, in addition to trying to guarantee access to its markets and the exploitation of workers.

The mechanisms for achieving these objectives are also the same: interference and recurrent attempts to limit the national sovereignty of these countries through international campaigns controlled by the major news agencies and non-governmental organisations financed by EU funds; the push towards militarism and the arms race, as in the case of the current re-arming of Georgia; and looking for people in these countries who, in exchange for benefits for themselves or the interests they serve, defend the interests of the EU and the United States, as well as their economic groups, by accepting NATO's eastward expansion and allowing the installation of US military bases in the region, which have been used as a platform for supplying NATO troops in Afghanistan.

It is obvious that this road cannot be followed without surprises: imperialism, be it that of the US or the EU, faces the tenacious resistance of the people, who, both here and in those countries, are organising themselves to prevent such a backward step in the course of history.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), in writing. – (IT) While I believe Mr Ungureanu has done a good job, I do not think a new budget line for the Black Sea is appropriate. The Union has many priorities and any new investments must be carefully weighed up, even if we are talking about areas of prime importance in the field of energy. I therefore declare my vote against the abovementioned report.

Elisabetta Gardini (PPE), in writing. – (IT) Paragraph 39 of this report recalls the aim of diversifying routes. It specifically mentions the strategic importance of the Nabucco project.

While I acknowledge the significance of this project, I would like to underline the need to treat other projects in the Southern Corridor (ITGI, TAP and White Stream) as equally important. I would also like to reaffirm the fundamental role of South Stream in helping to achieve the aim of diversification.

Moreover, as well as the Constanta-Trieste pipeline which has already been mentioned, we should also comment on the fundamental role played by the Samsun-Ceyhan, which Mr Oettinger has acknowledged as being fundamental for reducing traffic in the Bosphorus Strait and, consequently, also the risk of environmental accidents in the Black Sea (Odessa conference, 27 July 2010).

Only by taking into consideration all of the possible routes, and not just some of them, will it ultimately be possible to achieve the aim of diversifying energy sources and making Europe energy independent.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution on an EU strategy for the Black Sea. The strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the EU was recognised in 2007, in the context of Romania's and Bulgaria's accession to the EU. Developments in Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia started having a direct impact on EU internal affairs, and the EU acknowledged the need to reflect upon its stronger involvement in the area. This resulted in the launch of a new EU policy approach towards the region, called the Black Sea Synergy. The aim of the Black Sea Synergy is to develop regional cooperation between the EU and the region, as well as within the region. I agree with the opinion that the main objectives of a Black Sea strategy should entail building a space of peace, stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region, as well as ensuring EU energy security. As a consequence, security, good governance, energy, transport, environmental, socio-economic and human development should be considered as priority actions. A security dimension of the Black Sea must include resolute actions for strengthening democratic rule, good governance and State capacity building. Finally, economic, social and human development within the Black Sea region is an important premise for transforming the Black Sea into a stable and prosperous space.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) The Black Sea region is a strategic area for Europe. Therefore, a strengthening of cooperation at many levels is in the European Union's interest. For these measures to be successful, they need to be consistent and to take into account the differences in conditions between particular countries. Care should also be taken to ensure that it is not just giving on our part. The countries of the Black Sea Basin have much to offer us, starting from sources of energy and natural riches. I share the rapporteur's fears on the question of the lack of a clear strategy towards these countries. In this situation, a large role could be played by Bulgaria and Romania, which are already part of the Union. It is there that they understand the region's politics best. The last issue is Turkey, and we should definitely remember Turkey, because in contrast to Europe, it is a country which is developing at a frantic pace. We should look after this partnership.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) As a strategic bridge connecting Europe with Central Asia and the Middle East, the Black Sea region is extremely important for the European Union. If to these purely geographical considerations we add the fact that many countries in the region are also Member States of the Union, we will be in a better position to understand why Europe has, for many years, been working to strengthen relations with the countries in this area. The Ungureanu report calls on both the Commission and the European External Action Service to establish a strategy for increasingly close relations of cooperation between the European Union and the Black Sea region. Such relations should, however, be subject to strict controls, in order to maintain effective coordination of activities and the subdivision of responsibilities. I believe, in fact, that the success of such an important partnership depends, to some extent, on the peaceful resolution of current conflicts. Lastly, I should like to highlight the part of the report that calls on the Union to promote strategies to strengthen the institutions of the countries in the Black Sea area, because I believe that respect for democracy needs to underpin such relations.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted for this report because I consider it to be extremely important for the Black Sea region and the EU. Discussions on the Black Sea Synergy began in 2007. The proposal for the Danube strategy was drawn up in 2006. The Danube strategy will be finalised in the first half of this year. It is great that we are discussing the Black Sea now, but I believe that we need to conclude this discussion with a concrete proposal. The Black Sea can contribute to the development of the Danube. The

Danube region contributes to the development of the Black Sea. Both regions are interdependent. For this reason, I believe that a common approach should be considered. The issue that could bring an immediate result is energy. The new energy sources from the Caspian Sea, as well as the new routes, can develop the Black Sea region and, by implication, the Danube region. The most important project in this regard is the Nabucco pipeline. This is why I think that the Union's support is necessary for the completion of this project.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted for this report, which stresses that the main objective pursued by the EU and the Member States in the EU strategy for the Black Sea region should be to establish an area of peace, democracy, prosperity and stability, founded on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and providing for EU energy security, and considers that good governance, the rule of law, promotion of respect of human rights, migration management, energy, transport, the environment, and economic and social development should constitute priority actions.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (FR) The EU strategy for the Black Sea is entirely devoted to the development of the Nabucco pipeline and the creation of a free trade area guaranteeing its energy security and its hegemony over the region. The fight against the current environmental disaster has faded into the background, as have the social and economic interests of the peoples of the region. This text is an imperialist manifesto. It takes up the arguments of the propaganda used by the adventurist Georgian Government whose anti-democratic practices are not mentioned: propaganda and threats. It is an inflammatory text, and I shall vote against it.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The region of the Black Sea is crucial in strategic terms for the European Union due to its geographical location, which includes three European Union Member States – Greece, Romania and Bulgaria – and several important partners, including Russia and Turkey. On the other hand, concerns about security and energy supply lead to the need for greater involvement between the European Union and the countries of this region. Therefore, I agree with the main concerns expressed in the report: the guarantee of peace, democracy and stability in the Black Sea region, and looking after the European Union's energy security. Furthering relations between the European Union and the Black Sea region will, without doubt, be important, as the parties can benefit from this and cooperate more effectively.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) The strategic importance of the Black Sea is now well established. As a new border of the EU since the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, it is an obvious geostrategic space. The EU intends to become involved directly and permanently. Turkey, Georgia and Ukraine have repeatedly expressed their appetite for EU membership. The Commission responded by launching its Communication on Black Sea Synergy in 2007. While ensuring stability in the region, the Communication meets the needs of applicant States which are seeking both a Euro-Atlantic anchoring and a framework of enhanced cooperation. The EU must continue in this direction. It should strengthen its involvement in the Black Sea in order to give positive proof of its 'soft power' diplomacy. That way, the EU will guarantee that a space of peace, stability and prosperity is created, and also ensure the security of energy supply in the EU.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The report on an EU strategy for the Black Sea is important and for this reason, it is rightly very comprehensive. The further development of synergy in the Black Sea region is significant not just for energy strategy reasons. We need new impulses for the modernisation of the economic area and new enterprise initiatives

in the Black Sea region. It is particularly important that natural gas supplies for Europe should be secured. However, whatever the efforts by the EU, Russian interests should not be forgotten.

Russia is a vital strategic partner if peaceful and prosperous development is to be assured for the Black Sea region. Criticising the prolonged stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet represents an unnecessary provocation. Nonetheless, I have voted in favour of the report.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) Another reason why the report is important is because of its references to the Black Sea's importance as a natural resource and the environmental situation in this region. A fact that should not be ignored is that an unprecedented increase in fish mortality has been noted recently in the Black Sea. The biggest polluters affecting the marine biodiversity are the Dnieper, Don, Dniester and Danube rivers (which spill 60 000 tonnes of phosphorous and 340 tonnes of inorganic nitrogen into the Black Sea every year). Other factors that contribute to the degradation of the Black Sea are excessive fishing and waste materials. A group of experts estimated that subaquatic life will completely disappear from the Black Sea in approximately 30 years due to hydrogen sulphide. I believe that these issues should be as high as possible on the European agenda.

Franz Obermayr (NI), in writing. – (DE) In 2007, the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the EU was recognised. Following the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, part of the Black Sea became an inland sea of the EU. As developments in this region, which is geopolitically situated between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia, also have an impact on EU internal affairs, there is a need for stronger involvement in the area. The aim is to develop regional cooperation between the EU and the region, as well as within the region. The Black Sea region is intended to be developed into an area of stability, security, democracy and prosperity. In addition, joint projects are being set up, such as the creation of a Black Sea Civil Society Forum, strengthening of the academic and students' networks and creation of an Institute for European Studies in the Black Sea region. I have therefore voted in favour of the report.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), in writing. – (PL) The Black Sea region is an important one for the European Union, and a region which requires an integrated approach and greater visibility of EU action in the future. The region needs democratic measures to be put in place, intended chiefly to ensure security, stability and peace, as well as to increase prosperity. The objective of the strategy is also to ensure the EU's energy security. In the context of shaping a strategy for the Black Sea macro-region, and then for the Danube region, the proposal put forward by the European Commission in 2007 entitled 'Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative' (which recognised the region as strategic for the EU) is the best method of dealing with the abovementioned issues. Unfortunately, Black Sea Synergy results have so far been rather limited. Furthermore, no clear and comprehensive picture exists of the current implementation results, in view of which the criticism is increasingly being made that the EU lacks a coherent vision and that the strategy is too fragmented. Therefore, as the rapporteur says, while building upon the merits of the Black Sea Synergy, the EU strategy for the Black Sea should put in place a stronger policy framework and boost EU involvement in the Black Sea region. Just as with the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea region and the Danube region, success in implementation will depend on good dialogue at all levels of regional cooperation, because this dialogue will lead to proposals for appropriate and regular reporting, monitoring, evaluation and follow-up mechanisms.

Alfredo Pallone (PPE), in writing. – (IT) The strategic importance of the Black Sea region has now been recognised since 2007: with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU, the Black Sea began to have a direct impact on the Union's internal affairs, which is why there needs to be greater EU involvement in the area. In my opinion, the implementation of a strategy to develop greater cooperation between the EU and the region is a goal that the Union should set itself as soon as possible. This initiative, called the Black Sea Synergy, could transform the region into an area of stability, security, democracy and prosperity. In line with this House, I gave my assent – through my vote in favour – to supporting the creation and launch of the Black Sea Synergy. I believe the economic, social and cultural development of the region can be promoted, with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, by further liberalising trade and intensifying commerce within the region. In the context of development and greater integration between the Member States, by giving my assent, I encourage the growth and development of the Black Sea region by means of an action plan containing clear objectives and flagship initiatives.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), in writing. – We call on the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to draw up a strategy for the Black Sea region in parallel with the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, thus defining an integrated and comprehensive EU approach to addressing the challenges and opportunities of the region, with a detailed action plan, clear objectives, flagship initiatives and benchmarks. We believe that the strategy will make for effective coordination of activities and division of tasks. As well as this, the EP reiterates its call on the Commission and the EEAS to carry out regular reviews of the implementation of the strategy by establishing concrete monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and reporting mechanisms, and urges that the relevant European Parliament committees be consulted at key stages of this process.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), in writing. – (IT) As a result of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the European Union in 2007, some parts of the shores of the Black Sea became part of Europe. In the same year, a new European policy called Black Sea Synergy was created, which works to promote stability, security, democracy and prosperity in the region.

As early as 2008, the European Parliament expressed its support for the creation of the Synergy and also asked for the elaboration of a detailed Action Plan for the area with a number of concrete objectives to be reached. Unfortunately, so far, the project seems to have been a partial failure, partly as a result of the lack of visibility of the funds made available. A specific budget line must therefore be created for it as soon as possible. It should provide clear rules for disbursing funds, so that the requirements and the specific characteristics of the region can be focused upon.

We need to involve the local authorities, business communities and non-governmental organisations present in the territory to a greater extent. The potential for economic and social growth in the Black Sea region must be developed, starting with areas such as lifelong learning and the adjustment of education to labour market requirements, as well as planning an inter-regional trade strategy capable of increasing the volume of international trade.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D), in writing. – The strategic importance of the Black Sea in terms of energy, trade and transport can sometimes mean that environmental concerns are sidelined. In its 2007 communication on the Black Sea Synergy, the Commission stated that 'Community accession to the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution is a priority'. In 2008, the Commission confirmed that it was 'examining the conditions for European Community accession'. The report we voted on today reaffirms

the importance of this convention, and I would like to reiterate the need for the Commission to continue towards full EU accession to it. We must work with other partners under this framework to ensure full implementation of the environmental protection measures which the region desperately needs.

Csanád Szegedi (NI), *in writing.* – (HU) I believe that the report, which is aimed at the development of the Black Sea region under the relevant EU strategy, deserves support. I consider it important for the EU to draw up an action plan regarding Black Sea synergy. Achieving peace and stability in the region is, in my opinion, a priority objective, and guaranteeing energy security through the Nabucco project is of no small importance either.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The Black Sea region is of major strategic importance for the European Union. This importance results from its geographical location, encompassing three Member States of the European Union, namely, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria, a candidate country, Turkey, and six partners, including Russia. Apart from this, the challenges with regard to security and energy supplies require the European Union to achieve greater involvement and commitment in its relations with the countries of this region. Therefore, I subscribe to the concerns expressed in the document voted on today, which fall into two categories: to guarantee peace, democracy and stability in the Black Sea region and to guarantee the security of the European Union's energy supply. I believe that from a regional point of view, it is necessary to create synergies and develop greater cooperation by establishing a more effective partnership with regard to transport and energy, with a view to greater diversification of supply channels and sources. The strengthening of the dialogue between the European Union and the Black Sea region will certainly be advantageous, since the different parties will be able to benefit from more effective cooperation.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) I supported the report on EU strategy in the Black Sea region. The measures previously taken in the Eastern European Mediterranean were not coordinated and the results achieved have been marginal. The Black Sea region has known bilateral conflict for many, many years. In view of the fact that two EU Member States border the Black Sea and the region has therefore become one of the Union's direct neighbours, the European Union must engage more closely in regional dialogue in order to foster political stability in the region. Cooperation in establishing regional structures will also benefit the environmental situation, which is currently a cause for considerable concern. The EU needs to provide active support in order to influence the balance between economic development and environmental protection. After all, Europe also has interests that it pursues in the Black Sea region. The area is an integral part of the EU's energy strategy, so that this new strategy is an implementation of the higher energy strategy and will bring synergy and continuity to our work at European level.

9. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 13:10 and resumed at 15:00)

IN THE CHAIR: LIBOR ROUČEK

Vice-President

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

11. Debates on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law(debate)

11.1. Pakistan: murder of the Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer

President. The next item is the debate on the seven motions for resolutions on Pakistan ⁽¹⁾.

Marietje Schaake, *author.* – Mr President, there is a fundamental struggle going on in Pakistan and the extremism that we have seen has to end, especially the abusive blasphemy laws. These are leading to a climate of fear and intolerance and, in the worst cases, extremism.

The fight against extremism is not an easy task, which is why the Pakistani Government and all those citizens who agree that intolerance and extremism are unacceptable need our support. We have to continue to wipe out terrorism.

The Governor, Mr Taseer, was violently murdered out of sheer intolerance by a guard from his own security detail, a person who should have protected him. His daughter, Shehrbano, wrote a letter which was published in *The New York Times*, from which I would like to quote, because I think she gets to the essence and it is very good to use her words in memory of her father.

She says of the perpetrator: ‘Mr Qadri and his supporters may have felled a great oak that day, but they are sadly mistaken if they think they have succeeded in silencing my father’s voice or the voices of millions like him who believe in the secular vision of Pakistan’s founder, Mohammed Ali Jinnah’. She continues: ‘There are those who say my father’s death was the final nail in the coffin for a tolerant Pakistan. That Pakistan’s liberal voices will now be silenced. But we buried a heroic man, and not the courage he inspired in others’.

Others followed in their condemnation of the blasphemy laws, even conservative politicians. We have to support that here in the European Parliament. The daughter of Governor Taseer went to Smith College and she studied European politics and human rights, but too many people in Pakistan are educated in madrasahs. We have to make sure that the young generation has opportunities, and learns how to live together in the diverse society which is Pakistan.

Tomasz Piotr Poręba, *author.* – (PL) Mr President, several weeks after the governing coalition in Pakistan was on the verge of collapse, the country was rocked by the shooting, in broad daylight, of the Governor of Punjab. Salmaan Taseer was governor of the country’s wealthiest and most populous province, and was also an important politician in the ruling party. He died because he had the moral strength and the courage to demand the release of the Christian woman Asia Bibi, who has been sentenced to death for blasphemy. His murder, carried out by one of his own security guards and inspired by Muslim extremists, is not just another attack on a highly placed politician in Pakistan and proof of the dramatically low level of security there. It is, principally, testimony to the increasingly visible slide of the country – of Pakistan – towards a situation in which part of the armed forces, the judiciary and the political elite support, both openly and secretly, a policy of concessions towards Islamic political and religious extremists.

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes

Yesterday, in this Chamber, we debated the subject of the persecution of Christians. Today, we have adopted a resolution on the matter. It seems to me that scope for activity is opening up for Mrs Ashton and her service to put diplomatic and political pressure on the Pakistani authorities, who must at last start to fight religious extremism.

Eija-Riitta Korhola, *author.* – Mr President, it was shocking, but sadly not surprising, to receive the news that Governor Taseer has been murdered. I personally knew Benazir Bhutto, and Minister Shahbaz Bhatti has become a good friend of mine. What links all three of them is their amazing courage as vocal and visible critics of blasphemy laws and their abuse by extremist groups.

The government of Pakistan has indeed taken several important steps to improve the rights of minorities, for example, by allocating a minimum quota in public jobs. The government has also formed a committee to review all discriminatory laws, including the blasphemy law. However, the work has not yet finished. Despite several major steps, so long as there is a legal loophole, such as that in the current blasphemy law, so massive that it enables terrorists and extremists to push their own agenda forward, it is difficult to believe in a true commitment to democracy.

I hope that, with this resolution, we can express our continuing solidarity with the government of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism and the spread of extremism.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, *author.* – (PL) Mr President, exactly eight months ago, on 20 May, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on religious freedom in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Today, this subject has returned to our Chamber again, as a result of the religiously motivated sentence of death handed down to 45 year old Asia Bibi and the murder of the Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, who had spoken out publicly in her defence.

It turns out that the situation we described eight months ago has not only failed to improve, but has become yet worse. In Pakistan, today, one can lose one's life both for so-called religious blasphemy and for freedom of speech – in this case, a public statement about a judicial sentence. The murder of Mr Taseer shows how delicate a situation we face. Pakistan is divided by religion to such an extent, that on both sides – Christian and Muslim – people are dying, including the representatives of local elites. Public support for amendment of the Pakistan Penal Code and, in particular, of Section 295 C, which prescribes capital punishment for blasphemy, can also involve the risk of death.

We should, however, require courage from Pakistani politicians and, in particular, from the opposition, for example, the Pakistan Muslim League, which is blocking government reform of the code. We can also support the work of the Ministry for Minority Affairs and help the government of Prime Minister Gilani in such matters as improving the quality of journalism and media reporting and the standard of educational materials in schools, for example. Today, the European Parliament is not interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs, but is only calling attention to Article 20 of Pakistan's 1973 Constitution and the freedom of religion for which it provides.

Marie-Christine Vergiat, *author.* – (FR) Mr President, I would like to open this speech by saying that I read with much interest the joint resolution on Pakistan and, in particular, on the assassination of Governor Taseer. It offers a strange contrast to the resolution which was adopted this morning on Christian minorities.

All of us here are committed, or so I hope, to protecting freedom of expression, conscience and religion. What we should be equally preoccupied with are all those who fall victim to persecution because of their religious choices, including when they decide to change religion and also when they do not believe in God.

If we want to combat fundamentalism, of whatever kind that may be, then we must treat all victims of this fundamentalism in the same way. No religion is, or ever was, invulnerable to what I will call intolerable deviations. Just let us remind ourselves of the mass murder of American Indians, particularly in the Caribbean and in Latin America. Let us remind ourselves of the sorrowful period of the Crusades, the Inquisition or the wars of religion between Catholics and Protestants. Let us remember the anti-Semitism which had such devastating effects during the 20th century and which lives on more or less latently in a number of EU countries.

Every religion has its own form of fundamentalism and the first victims of such fundamentalism are often the religious moderates of those same religions. From this perspective, the assassination of the Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, is a classic example. This man was murdered because he was a model of tolerance and because he dared to condemn the blasphemy laws in force in his country and the abusive usage of these by certain extremist groups in cases such as that of Asia Bibi, a Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy under the Pakistan Penal Code.

What is even more unacceptable is the praising of his murderer by fanatical groups. Let us not forget that the blasphemy law is applied primarily to Muslims, that it affects all religious minorities, and, in particular, women, but also trade-union activists, journalists and lawyers, and that people from all of these groups are also frequently deprived of their fundamental freedoms, if not obliged to go into hiding.

It is therefore time that the Commission and the External Action Service changed their policy, and I would like you, Commissioner, to provide an accurate assessment of the agreement with Tunisia and the agreement with Pakistan on democracy and human rights, and I would like Tunisia to be a lesson to us, to be a lesson to you.

Jean Lambert, *author.* – Mr President, I think all of us would want to express our condolences to the family and friends of Salmaan Taseer, the Governor of Punjab put in place by the government of Pakistan, and we are remembering here today his clear support for Asia Bibi – a position he knew to be controversial and indeed dangerous.

We are rightly distressed by his murder and the reaction to it by part of the population of Pakistan, but we should not forget, as well, that many have mourned him and have done that in public as a public act. It is an act we should be commending, like, for example, the action taken by the media regulator against certain media with regard to their coverage of the alleged murderer.

However, as we know, the blasphemy law in Pakistan puts the lives of Pakistani citizens at risk: Muslim, Christian and others alike, as many speakers have said this afternoon. We are aware that Pakistan is a new democracy, that it is facing conflict on its borders, and that it has faced the disaster of the recent flood, as well as the earthquake only this week. We know that the government is struggling, but we also recognise that it needs our support in terms of developing democracy within Pakistan, not least in the political battle against extremism and for universal human rights, and it is our role as democratic parliamentarians

to support all those who are working for positive change and to give them the voice that others would deny them.

We are also asking for action by the government of Pakistan, not least to remove the reservations on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – which they ratified with a large number of reservations – and we urged this in our recent delegation visit to Pakistan. We want them, as well, to continue the efforts to change the blasphemy law because this is a law that is more abused than properly used.

Tunne Kelam, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – Mr President, we all strongly condemn the brutal murder of the Governor of Punjab on 4 January. This murder was committed in the context that Mr Taseer opposed the notorious blasphemy law which has been a legal justification for the persecution and suppression of other religious groups.

When expressing concern over the increased influence of extremists in Pakistan, we also realise that moderate Muslims and the Pakistani Government, of which Mr Taseer was an influential member, have suffered a grave loss and we offer our condolences to them.

We are worried that the young lawyers praised the assassin, but we also take notice that an overwhelming majority of Pakistani society has condemned this murder. It is important that influential religious authorities have called for the amendment of the blasphemy law, and this is also our demand. We wish the Pakistani authorities all success in increasing their efforts to fight extremism there.

Mitro Repo, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (FI) Mr President, the murder of Salmaan Taseer basically reflects the religious intolerance that prevails in Pakistani society. Taseer was one of those rare people that dared to speak out against Pakistan's Blasphemy Law. He had asked the President to pardon Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy, and had also visited her in prison. The fate of a citizen who opposes injustice is harsh and cruel in today's Pakistan. Will Asia Bibi's fate be the same if she is pardoned? Will they murder her too?

We might well ask whether a state like Pakistan should enjoy the trade benefits that the European Union offers. Parliament should make respect for human rights a fundamental element when the EU is debating the regulation on emergency autonomous trade preferences for Pakistan.

Kristiina Ojula, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – Mr President, the murder of Governor Salmaan Taseer is not only a private tragedy but a tragedy for democracy in Pakistan.

All the deplorable incidents and cases that have been outlined in the resolution altogether constitute an intimidating sign of Pakistani society's reluctance to move towards secularisation, and of the rise of religious extremism.

How can Pakistan even call itself a democracy when the freedom of religion that is granted by the constitution is completely ignored by applying the blasphemy laws, to which the late Salmaan Taseer was so opposed.

I would like the European Union to consider the ramifications of the application of such inhumane laws on relations with Pakistan. Pakistan would benefit in many aspects by repealing the blasphemy laws and revoking the penalties that have been based on those laws. I also would expect the government of Pakistan to reinforce the measures that have been taken to fight the spread of violent extremism.

Violence causes violence and I am quite confident that Pakistan cannot afford the escalation of a full-scale civil war with extremist groupings such as the Taliban.

Ryszard Czarnecki, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, once again, we are talking about Pakistan, and once again we have a problem and a political murder. We are, indeed, talking about this matter one more time. There was a resolution about Pakistan a couple of months ago. The problem has come back again, and it is a kind of hot potato. It seems to me that it is necessary, here, to say something about the unacceptable toleration being shown towards those Muslim imams who make public calls in Pakistan – in Peshawar for example – for killings, offering, for example, to reward the perpetrators financially. Such situations have occurred, and the Pakistani authorities have not reacted to them. It should be said clearly that there is a certain sense in which their failure to act and their lack of reaction mean they share responsibility for these things.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Mr President, to make a personal statement, I spent a lot of time with Salmaan Taseer when we were both in our twenties. Indeed, we were friends. Salmaan wrote to me at Parliament to invite me to stay as his personal guest at the Governor's house in the Punjab. That letter arrived after Governor Taseer's murder.

Salmaan was a man of charm, charisma and high intelligence. He was also very capable and effective. He represented the best tradition of Pakistan – a devout Muslim but not in any way fundamentalist. As has been said, Salmaan strongly supported a Christian lady who had been sentenced under blasphemy laws. Salmaan paid for that support with his life. It was a political assassination.

Pakistan is not only a large, developing country. It is a country with over 20 nuclear warheads. I came here today, first and foremost, to express my profound sorrow, but I must also express my concern – all our concern – for Pakistan.

Thomas Mann (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, the violent death of the Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, who was always a proponent of religious tolerance, brings the strengthening of extremist forces to the eyes of the world. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in the streets after this atrocity, marching not against the murder but in support of the person who committed it. Mr Taseer spoke out vehemently against the blasphemy laws, which prescribe the death sentence for blasphemers. Just recently, as some of my fellow Members have already mentioned, the Christian, Asia Bibi, has been sentenced to death for supposedly having insulted the prophet Mohammed.

As a moderate member of the PPP political party, Salmaan Taseer was one of the strongest voices against extremism. His death weakens the government, which is already fighting for political survival following the withdrawal of a coalition partner. There are only 3 million Christians in Pakistan's population of 160 million. What fate awaits this always peaceable minority?

Europe must intervene here and the delegation for relations with the countries of Southeast Asia, of which I am Vice-President, will continue to give its full backing to the human rights movement. This murder must be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrator and the people behind him must be brought to justice.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – (LT) Mr President, yes, the situation in Pakistan is particularly complicated, both due to internal and external factors, and therefore, events like a political assassination for religious reasons, and of such an important figure,

immediately rock the entire country and the whole of society. After such shocks, events in the country may take a dangerous turn towards strengthening religious fanaticism and restricting human rights. Our resolution should help to ensure that there is nevertheless a different course of events, and that even in this situation, the Pakistani Government can still find the strength to go down the road of bolstering human rights and opposing religious fanaticism. We must provide significant support to such steps, as well as, undoubtedly, the independence and protection of the judiciary in complex cases concerning blasphemy.

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, I have expressed my firm support on several occasions when it came to taking strong action in defence of human rights in the EU's relations with third countries. I do so again in relation to the events that transpired in Pakistan, as such a position conveys the message that Europe does not abandon those who raise their voice in support of tolerance, freedom of religion and the equal treatment of minorities. We are well aware that the persecution of Christians exists in many countries. Not only in Pakistan would there be a need for leaders like the late Salmaan Taseer. For this reason, the European Union must take every opportunity to express the importance of its common values with a single voice through the European External Action Service. One such common value is the freedom of religion. If we do not speak out against the atrocities committed against Christians or other religious minorities, we cannot take our own faith seriously either.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Europe cannot remain powerless in the face of what is happening in Pakistan. The murder of the Governor of Punjab, Mr Taseer, is a tragic and appalling act in a situation which has worsened enormously over recent months.

The division between Christians and Muslims is increasingly clear, but the law on blasphemy is still at the root of many acts that violate fundamental freedoms. Anyone who opposes or merely expresses their disapproval of this rule, as the Governor of Punjab did, is suppressed.

The Governor is dead because he was a moderate and because of his moderate views, because of his courage in expressing opposition to this and other rules that violate fundamental freedoms. This is why a failure by Europe to take clear and strong action risks leaving those who are bravely fighting for something that we should support in isolation.

Pino Arlacchi (S&D). – Mr President, just a few words of criticism on the way some sections of the European public and also some sections of this Parliament are treating Pakistan and its fight against terrorism.

I see too many Pakistan-bashing exercises and I see a disregard of the effort that the Pakistani Government and civil society are making against extremism. It should be very clear to everybody that 90% or more of Pakistani people are against terrorism and that they are paying a very high price for this.

The death of Governor Salmaan Taseer has been condemned by an overwhelming majority of the people, and also by the most prominent religious scholars. Moderate Muslims and all government authorities have also suffered a great loss and that should be fully recognised by everybody.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, freedom of religion is one of the fundamental human rights. It is being violated, however, around the world almost daily. It is nothing less than ruthless intolerance.

The Blasphemy Law goes back to the times of the military dictatorship that was in power in Pakistan in the 1980s. It is not acceptable that the Law be used to persecute religious minorities and sentence dozens of people to death every year. The EU should act decisively and consistently to persuade the Pakistani authorities to repeal this cruel law.

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, when Governor Salmaan Taseer was buried, it seemed to me as though any hope for a moderate, stable Pakistan was buried with him. This disgusting murder of a dedicated and enlightened public servant was sparked by his advocacy of reforming Pakistan's draconian blasphemy laws. In particular, he championed the case of a Christian woman who is currently awaiting execution – would you believe it – having been convicted of defaming Islam.

We in this Parliament have long called for the reform or scrapping of these wretched blasphemy laws, which are invoked frequently against Pakistan's religious minorities. This assassination underlines the growing radicalisation of Pakistani society. Jinnah, were he alive today, would be shocked.

Few mainstream politicians dared to follow Salmaan Taseer's lead and suggest a reform of the blasphemy laws and even fewer will be able to do so now. They will be afraid. Instead, the violent radicals and fanatics – including, I am afraid, leading jurists – praised the assassin and called for his release. They seem to be winning the battle of ideas in Pakistan. As a result, domestic terrorism is flourishing, and we saw this phenomenon again last week.

Can the EU now sustain a strategic relationship with a country so unstable and particularly given our generous concessions over trade and aid?

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, we are talking here about a double tragedy: firstly, the execution of an innocent man and, secondly, done by someone who was supposed to be minding him, his bodyguard. I can empathise and sympathise with the family in particular, because only a week ago, we had a similar experience in different circumstances, where a beautiful 27-year-old girl from Ireland on her honeymoon in Mauritius was killed in her own bedroom when she walked in on staff who were robbing her room. They strangled her, threw her into the bath and tried to pretend it was suicide. Circumstances are different but the result is the same: an innocent person dead.

Also, a few weeks ago, I was part of the EU-US delegation to America and there we met the Foreign Minister of Pakistan. He struck me as being a very reasonable, sensible, fair-minded person and he emphasised that religion is about tolerance and we should try to get that message through to the extremists and the fundamentalists.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, what is particularly alarming about the murder of the Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, is the background to this violent act.

The fact that this murder took place with the silent approval of Pakistani spiritual leaders, and that local lawyers support the murderer, means that murder on grounds of religious intolerance is tolerated in Pakistani society. Pakistani laws on blasphemy make it possible to persecute religious minorities with the threat of the death penalty, as has happened to Asia Bibi, a mother of five children who is awaiting her punishment in prison.

We therefore really cannot remain indifferent to what is happening. Our pressure on the Pakistani administration is quite legitimate and I expect a similar response from all free and democratic forces around the world. We cannot today tolerate – in the third millennium – brutal behaviour from the middle ages perpetrated by oppressors in an abuse of religion.

Csanád Szegedi (NI). – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I must point out that the situation in Pakistan is quite unsettling not only in this case, but also in general. Pakistan's problems must not be viewed as something far away, since we know all too well that the problems arising in the region of Inner Asia, whether they are economic problems, ethnic problems or even the issue of emigration, will sooner or later ripple over to the area of the European Union. Thus, there is a very real need for us to address the problem of Pakistan. Pakistan is burdened by two problems in particular: on the one hand, the continuous attacks from Afghanistan and India, and, on the other, the issue which is the most important for us in this sitting, Muslim extremists, to whom Salmaan Taseer also fell victim. For this reason, I ask the European Parliament that we assure Pakistan of our support, so that the situation can come to a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, the assassination of Governor Salmaan Taseer, a dedicated voice for tolerance and the rights of minorities in Pakistan, shows a human rights violation on a dramatic scale. Exercising the right to freedom of expression and religion in Pakistan is punishable under law by imprisonment or even death. Salmaan Taseer paid with his life in the defence not only of religious freedom, but also of the life and freedom of others. We must support those who fight courageously and risk their lives for human rights and democracy. We urge the authorities in Pakistan to punish the criminals and their accomplices and get rid of the blasphemy laws.

Gerard Batten (EFD). – Mr President, the murder of Governor Salmaan Taseer is indeed a brutal and tragic crime. He was killed, apparently, by an Islamic extremist because he advocated changes to the blasphemy law. The murder is a tragedy for Pakistan, but what does it mean for the West?

Instead of doing all we can to combat Islamic fundamentalism taking deeper root in Europe, we placate and appease it. Sharia law is now recognised in some tribunals in the UK. There are inner city areas where the de facto writ of Sharia law runs. Europe, having produced the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the wonders of the modern scientific age, now lies supine before a 6th century ideology.

Governments are frightened to confront it because of political correctness and the economic power of some Islamic countries. We must support the moderate and progressive elements in countries like Pakistan, but above all, we must assert that Sharia law and Islamic fundamentalism have no place in a modern, Western, liberal democracy.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, firstly, I would like to say that, for my part, I condemn the brutal assassination of the Governor of Punjab province. He was a prominent figure in the political life of Pakistan who was noted for his courageous fight against extremism, intolerance and fanaticism. Seven months ago, I supported here the need to urgently revise the provisions relating to offences against religions in the so-called 'blasphemy laws'.

I would like to remind you that the possibilities for abuse offered by these laws create an atmosphere of intolerance that encourages violence on religious grounds and also promotes discrimination, intimidation and persecution of religious minorities. The case of Asia Bibi that actually culminated in the murder of Governor Taseer is symbolic in this regard. I believe that the Pakistani authorities must demonstrate through action their declared commitment to the fight against extremism in this country by abolishing the blasphemy laws. I would like, therefore, to reiterate the call to the voices of reason in Pakistan that was initiated by the daughter of Punjab's deceased Governor, Shehribano Taseer.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) Mr President, I would like to begin by expressing my sympathy with the citizens of Pakistan and my sorrow over the loss of such an important political figure as Salmaan Taseer.

I am concerned about the fact that people with specific beliefs and religious groups, including Christians, continue to be persecuted in the country, for example, the notorious case of the woman who, on the basis of Sharia law, on the basis of a law on blasphemy, is actually awaiting execution. The fact that Islamist extremist groups continue to exist directly inside the Pakistani security services does not contribute to the stability of the country, and clearly undermines confidence in the country being governed by the laws of a legal state. I hope that the reform process will go further in the country, and I would therefore like to call on all political forces, including religious institutions, to provide greater support for moderation, tolerance and mutual respect between communities.

Michael Gahler (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, in many ways, Pakistan is a fragile country. It is politically fragile because the government is not strong enough to implement effectively its moderate course of political and economic stabilisation and because the army's offensive against extremists in the border areas is, in fact, causing resistance to increase. It is economically fragile because the global financial crisis and the devastating floods in the country have set back its development by several years. It is socially fragile because social structures have failed to develop over the decades in such a way as to enable large sections of society to share in economic development.

We in the European Union must enter into dialogue with the political class there in order to promote a recognition that fundamental economic and social change are necessary so that people can be offered prospects that promise them more than the alternatives of extremism and fundamentalism.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, the most hateful and violent regimes ever known were the anti-religious regimes of the Jacobins, Nazis and Communists in Europe. For this reason, I do not think it is helpful for Mrs Vergiat to attack religions in such sweeping terms. The fact remains, however, that religions are often misused for ideological purposes, which is something that we need to combat. This is the case in Pakistan, for example.

On the other hand, we must remember that Pakistan was created on the basis of religious criteria when India was partitioned. It is a country with no history, but was established as a Muslim state by the British colonial powers as they pulled out of the region. That is why we should understand that this is an Islamic state. However, we must insist that this country should be organised along tolerant lines and that religious freedom should be upheld. Christians must be treated with greater respect than has been the case to date and the EU needs to show greater vigour in stepping up to its role as an advocate for this group. After all, if Europe does not stand up for the world's Christians, then who will?

Sari Essayah (PPE). – (FI) Mr President, more than one of us here has said how Salmaan Taseer was someone who stood up for vulnerable women and representatives of religious minorities, through both words and action. He fought against injustice generally. Taseer was a supporter of the democratic state and spoke out against Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws, saying that they were enacted by human beings and were therefore capable of being amended by them.

Several here have already spoken of how he vigorously defended a Christian woman who had been sentenced to death and tried to overturn her sentence. All these deeds in the name of justice were his undoing. The EU should support the forces in Pakistan that seek reforms, because not everyone in Pakistan backs fundamentalists. In its foreign policy, the EU should therefore consider wisely its position on the situation in Pakistan.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, this debate is yet more proof that the European Union is shocked by the brutal murder of Mr Salmaan Taseer, Governor of Pakistan's Punjab province, in Islamabad on 4 January. High Representative Ashton strongly condemned the killing in her statement on 4 January. She urged the Pakistani authorities to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. This assassination is all the more distressing as, based on available reports, it is linked to Mr Taseer's outspoken defence of a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, who was sentenced to death under questionable blasphemy charges.

It should be noted that on 12 November 2010, High Representative Ashton expressed deep concern over the death sentence given to Mrs Asia Bibi. She called on Pakistan to abolish the death penalty and respect human rights, as guaranteed under the international conventions to which the country is a party.

The European Union has repeatedly brought up the continued application of the blasphemy laws with the government of Pakistan as part of this human rights dialogue. We are conscious of the fact that the blasphemy laws in their present form are open to abuse and have often been applied against religious minorities. We are also aware that false accusations have been used as a tool to settle private disputes or for personal gain.

We were encouraged by earlier steps taken by the government of Pakistan to try amending more controversial aspects of the laws. Ideally, of course, the blasphemy laws would be totally repealed. It is unfortunate that in the case of Mr Taseer's assassination, there has been widespread public support for the murderer. We are concerned that fatwas were not only issued against Mr Taseer but also against other public figures who have spoken out for a reform of the blasphemy laws. Inciting hatred and violence with impunity should not be allowed.

The government of Pakistan has a responsibility to protect its citizens, and we count on it to do everything possible to ensure their safety. There are fears that the murder of Mr Taseer reflects a rise in extremism and intolerance in Pakistan. We need to face up to the situation and consider carefully how to react, knowing that the government, and democratic institutions of the states more generally, continue to face daunting challenges. Let me be very clear here: there is no alternative but to continue to strengthen democratic and progressive forces in Pakistan's civil society.

Pakistan's constitution explicitly protects the rights of minorities, and accordingly, the government needs to tackle extremism not just in the border areas but also on the streets of Pakistani cities. We need to provide continued emphasis on education in our development cooperation and more needs to be done to promote tolerance within the educational system, especially towards minorities. We are well aware of the vulnerable situation of persons belonging to religious minorities in Pakistan; this does not just concern Christians but also Hindus, Shias, Ahmadis and others. The European Union should champion their common cause and not that of any particular group or religion, as this would play into the hands of those wishing to deepen divisions among Christians and Muslims.

We will continue to focus on the need to fully protect every individual's right to religious freedom in Pakistan or elsewhere.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place shortly.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Cristian Silviu Buşoi (ALDE), *in writing.* – I would like to express my deep indignation at the murder of the Governor of the province of Punjab in Pakistan, Salmaan Taseer, on 4 January 2011, for having spoken out against Pakistan's law against blasphemy. According to the values of our Western societies, murder is considered as the worst single crime. It is, therefore, difficult to understand how someone can commit murder as a form of retaliation. Freedom of conscience and freedom of religion are as important as freedom of speech, which may lead to conflicts between these freedoms. However, any definition by governments of what is to be considered as blasphemy is an unacceptable restriction on freedom of speech. A modern society should consider as legitimate all personal views expressed in an inoffensive manner. Moreover, if Pakistan is to become a tolerant society, such barbarian acts motivated by religious fundamentalism are to be condemned. This incident is yet another reminder that freedom of speech continues to be absent in some regions of the world. Given the history of his country, it was courageous for Salmaan Taseer to speak out against the blasphemy law and in favour of free speech. It is regrettable that this ultimately cost him his life.

11.2. Brazil: extradition of Cesare Battisti

President. – The next item is the debate on six motions for resolutions on Brazil: extradition of Cesare Battisti ⁽²⁾.

Mara Bizzotto, *author.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in international law, a political refugee is a person who, owing to a fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality.

Cesare Battisti is not a political refugee. Regardless of the cover offered by France for many years, we are talking about a mass-murderer, who carried out or ordered four murders, and who hid behind the pretext of political struggle to evade a life sentence. It is disgraceful that a great country such as Brazil can deny the extradition of an unpunished criminal by granting him political refugee status. The Italian authorities and, above all, the relations of the victims, insist that this criminal is brought to justice.

Faced with the arrogance of President Lula in denying extradition, the EU cannot leave the Italian Government by itself. Europe has, and must use, all the diplomatic instruments at its disposal to ensure that Mr Battisti is delivered to Italy, even at a cost of threatening to suspend cooperation agreements with Brazil.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki, *author.* – (FI) Mr President, respect for the independence of judicial powers and the legality of their decisions is one of the prerequisites for the rule of law and

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democratic society. Each person deserves the right to a fair trial and the judgment of an independent court of law should be respected.

In this case, the Brazilian Supreme Court decided to allow Battisti's extradition. The decisions taken in Italy to request extradition were all taken in the proper legal order. The European Court of Human Rights did not consider the appeal. In other words, this case is disposed of.

Now, the Brazilian authorities must act to ensure that the law is applied and extradite Battisti. My group hopes that the European External Action Service will do its utmost to ensure that the judicial system and rule of law prevail.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *author.* – (ES) Mr President, the truth is that I have made no attempt to conceal my discomfort with the issue and the situation, as I do genuinely believe that we are faced with an important issue. However, it is an issue that affects both Italy and Brazil and there are many forums in which I believe we must tackle the issue. However, I am not convinced that this forum, which is for discussing resolutions on violations of human rights throughout the world, is the right one.

I say this with the utmost respect, and from the outset, I offer my complete solidarity with all victims of terrorism in all corners of the world, not least this one. I say it in order to encourage general reflection on how these types of issue end up being discussed on a Thursday afternoon session, when, and I stress this point, in this context, we have a *sub judice* situation with a resolution already in place.

It is difficult for our group to support this situation and it is for this reason that we feel obliged to abstain. We intend to abstain, and I stress this, not because the content or issue do not merit reflection, only that we feel that this is not the time or the place to do it.

Roberta Angelilli, *author.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, through this resolution, we are appealing to the European institutions to play a role in affirming the rights of justice and legality as they carry out their diplomatic functions.

Today, the European Parliament is asking loud and clear that the Charter of Fundamental Rights not be regarded as just a collection of papers, and that citizens not be seen as mere consumers of the common market, but as holders of inalienable and non-negotiable fundamental rights. The relations of the victims of Cesare Battisti – who killed four decent, hard-working people in a senseless bloodbath in front of their families and children – came here yesterday in this spirit of trust.

Commissioner, with passion and the force of the law behind us, we are relying on everyone to do their part and, in these last few seconds, I should like to ask my fellow Members to dedicate a minute of reflection to the memory of the victims.

David-Maria Sassoli, *author.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we are here today in this Chamber to remember that the European Parliament and democratic institutions must protect and support the relatives of the victims of terrorism and provide the sense of justice that European public opinion demands.

In the resolution we have tabled and are shortly to vote upon, we point out that relations between Brazil and the European Union are based on mutual recognition and respect of the rule of law and of fundamental rights. There are therefore no question marks over our friendly relationship with Brazil.

I should like to point out that, in Italy, the defendant, Cesare Battisti, has been found guilty of four murders. Although a fugitive, Mr Battisti had the legal assurances in his trials – which were all conducted in the presence of his defence lawyer – that the Italian justice system had run its course, with all levels of justice exhausted, and that they sentenced him to two life sentences.

Mr President, even France – where Cesare Battisti had previously fled – decided back in 2004 to accept Italy's extradition request, recognising his crimes and the corresponding sentences, because Cesare Battisti is a criminal who must be brought to justice. Brazil's contradictory behaviour is difficult to understand, not least because the Brazilian authorities have not officially recognised him as a political refugee, which is one of the reasons to suspend the bilateral agreement between Italy and Brazil regarding extradition.

This is why the decision of the Supreme Court seemed incomprehensible to the victims' families and the wider public. Mr President, we are representing a Europe of rights and of rights for all. The victims have the right to know that those guilty of such heinous crimes will serve their sentence in the prisons of their own countries.

Ryszard Czarnecki, *author.* – (PL) Mr President, I am not Italian, I am not Brazilian, I am a citizen of a Member State of the European Union, and I do not want the Union to be a Union which has lost its sense of proportion – a Union in which a criminal enjoys the same rights as the victims of crimes and their families. This is not acceptable. It is a question of certain elementary standards – I would even say human standards – and not European ones. Speaking as someone who is not very emotionally involved and who, I suppose, can look at the situation coldly and objectively, it seems to me I can say on this matter that a certain loss of balance has, in fact, occurred here, which is inconceivable to our taxpayers and our voters. I think the decision of the Brazilian Supreme Court is incomprehensible and will be incomprehensible to everyone who looks into it.

Mario Mauro, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Romeva i Rueda, yesterday in a touching press conference held in Parliament, the relatives of the victims of the indiscriminate murders of Cesare Battisti spoke fairly and with dignity to once again present the issue at the heart of this tragic affair.

It is not a matter of revenge, but justice must be done. Therefore, because justice must be done, Cesare Battisti must be extradited, and because Mr Battisti must be extradited, we hope that through this resolution, Parliament can authoritatively and credibly amplify this same cry: it is not a matter of revenge, but justice must be done.

The European Union is a political project in which we have combined our values and our ideals to definitively defeat the power of ideologies, totalitarian ideologies, arbitrary violence and the limitless evil of terrorism. In order to realise this project, today, we forcefully ask once again: let us not seek revenge, but let us ensure that justice is done.

Gianluca Susta, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it happens all too often that intellectuals or high-powered institutions in some countries refuse to understand the phenomenon of Italian terrorism, raising doubts about the trustworthiness of our judicial system.

Since this is the legal basis for the refusal to extradite Cesare Battisti, we cannot but reject it. Cesare Battisti, an individual with something of an ambiguous past, is the product of a time in which thousands of young people – many of whom were desperately lonely – chose armed struggle as a means of political struggle and ended up turning the alienating utopian

dream they believed in into a crime. Other countries have experienced similar tragedies but none have so far offered the protagonists of these any chances to reform, unlike Italy, which, in fighting terrorism, really cemented its sense of national unity.

Taking up the appeal of the victims' relatives, we therefore ask for Cesare Battisti to be brought before the Italian judicial system, which will know how to show – as it has done in hundreds of other cases of former terrorists who are now reintegrated into social and civil life – that to be punished is also to make amends, as the Italian, Cesare Beccaria, taught Western legal civilisation, and not just intimidation or brutalisation, as the Brazilian authorities fear.

Ilda Figueiredo, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Mr President, we are dealing with a matter that is not truly urgent, but there is no lack of topics concerning truly urgent matters, such as the imprisonment and assassination of trade unionists in Colombia, repression and death in Honduras, or the tragic situation in the Israeli-occupied territories of Palestine.

If you want to talk about Brazil, then it would be a matter of true urgency to demonstrate our solidarity with the people affected by the storms that recently lashed the state of Rio de Janeiro, in particular, the cities of Nova Friburgo, Petrópolis and Teresópolis, which killed more than 700 people, left more than 13 000 people homeless, and caused incalculable damage.

It is lamentable that the European Parliament has not commented on this tragedy and has not asked the European Commission to express its active solidarity to the President of Brazil and its availability to provide any aid necessary. Therefore, from these seats, we congratulate the new President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, on her recent election. We send our feelings of solidarity and deep regret for the tragic consequences of the storms, feelings that extend to the Brazilian Congress, the families that are the victims of this tragedy and all the people of Brazil.

With regard to the resolution presented here, we insist on the need to respect the decisions of the legitimate authorities of Brazil, where Cesare Battisti is being held, and to await the decisions of the legitimate authorities of Brazil, without pressure from this Parliament. Therefore, I propose that the proposal be withdrawn in order to avoid a deplorable decision.

(The speaker agreed to take two blue card questions under Rule 149(8))

Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to reply to the fellow Member who said that there are many other urgent issues to be dealt with and so on, simply by stating the fact that, in contrast to many other issues which are quite clearly worthy of our interest, this is an urgent issue that involves not only a country outside the European Union, but one within it, and we are also referring to citizens who have been killed or disabled and who are European citizens.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, I have already said, and now repeat, that this is not a truly urgent matter. We know that the legitimate authorities in Brazil have this case in hand and that the Italian citizen is being held in Brazil. Therefore, what we are saying is that this Parliament must not put pressure on the legitimate authorities in Brazil. We have to await the decisions that they will make in due course. With regard to urgent matters, we have a whole host of issues here, including, in Brazil, solidarity with the victims of the storms, which have left more than 700 people dead.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I just have a simple question for Mrs Figueiredo. Do you not think that 30 years – because many years have passed since these people were killed – are not enough to ask urgently for justice, at last?

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, as we have already said and now repeat, Mr President, it is a matter of how we are discussing this matter. We are discussing it at a time when we should be discussing urgent issues. Even from the statements that Mrs Angelilli has made, it is clear that it could have been debated at other times and that it still can be debated at some other time, but not now as a matter of urgency. What was urgent was solidarity for the 700 people who died in the last few days in Brazil as the result of the storms.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Cesare Battisti is not a romantic hero as some have depicted him, but a savage murderer with a history of robbery who has been found guilty of killing four people with shots to the back of the neck.

He benefited unjustly from Mr Mitterrand's doctrine of political asylum and has been protected and idealised by some left-wing French intellectuals. Having fled to Brazil to avoid repatriation and prison, Mr Battisti was saved by President Lula due to an erroneous decision that was probably made for political reasons, with no regard for the suffering of the victims and their relatives.

Mrs Figueiredo, Parliament's request to the Brazilian authorities and to the Commission does not only ask for the respect of legal rules and bilateral agreements, but also aims to affirm the principle that no ideological reason can justify the actions of a murderer and no country may guarantee him impunity.

We must never forget that there is ethical value in the moral compensation of victims by serving a punishment. This is at the foundation of the social contract that props up all communities that are civilised, or that aim to be.

Salvatore Iacolino (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, 31 years after the blood spilled by the victims of the barbaric murders carried out by Cesare Battisti and his gang, it has still not been forgotten.

The pain of the victims' relatives, whom we heard from yesterday in a press conference in Strasbourg, is genuine proof of this. Indeed, it was Mr Mastella – then Minister for Justice in the Italian Government – who made major efforts through institutional actions to give final justice to the Battisti case.

Today, together with the relatives of the victims, the citizens of Italy and the whole country, it is the European Parliament – showing its extraordinary unity with a joint motion for a resolution – that is forcefully asking another country, which is a friend of Europe and a friend of Italy, for the immediate extradition of Cesare Battisti, who is a criminal and a terrorist and who has been convicted with definitive judgments, so as to finally bring to an end this difficult and painful episode that has been dragging on for too long.

Carlo Fidanza (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, 'By himself, he was a petty crook or a minor felon, but he was bright and like me, he also believed he could become a politician. The people most emotionally and physically wounded by the crimes of his gang have never asked for revenge but, most civilly, even now, they ask for truth and justice. Not because it is a life sentence, but because the judgment has been made and so

that the punishment decided upon according to the rules of our legal system may be respected and carried out'. Those are the words of Arrigo Cavallina, who recruited Cesare Battisti in prison when he was serving a sentence for robbery, talking about Mr Battisti, his crimes and the families of the victims.

This is the very essence of the entire affair: he was a common criminal, who reinvented himself as a terrorist and who has been sentenced to life in prison for carrying out or ordering the murders of four defenceless people, having sheltered first in Mexico, then France, and now in Brazil, protected by a network of international support as if he were a romantic revolutionary and not a ruthless murderer.

This is why the extradition of Cesare Battisti to Italy is not just the latest act in a long history of presumed political persecution, as some armchair intellectuals would still have us believe, but the legitimate claim of a Member – not to mention founding – State of the European Union to have the international treaties and its own judicial system respected.

(Applause)

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, I challenge your decision to allocate catch-the-eye simply on the basis of who had not spoken in the Pakistan debate. This is an entirely different debate on a different issue. So far, it has been a debate between Lusophones and Italophones. That is great, but perhaps other countries might want to have an opinion on this well, as well as other delegations from other political groups.

President. – I fully agree that this is a completely different debate but we have an allocated time of two minutes, so I am free to give time to two people. If you were in my shoes, how would you do it? I want to give a fair go to everybody who did not speak in the previous item, a fair go to the representatives of each political group. It is very much the situation that mainly our Italian colleagues spoke, so I will take care of that and give the floor mainly to non-Italian Members.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE). – *(FI)* Mr President, to some extent, I understand the frustration felt by some of my fellow Members concerning the urgency of a resolution on Cesare Battisti.

At the end of December, after President Lula da Silva issued a decision not to allow extradition, Berlusconi announced that he would recall his ambassador to Brazil and continue to fight to get Battisti extradited back to Italy. This is doubtless part of that same struggle.

It does not, however, reduce the seriousness of Battisti's crimes. He has evaded the Italian judiciary for 30 years now and so far, therefore, he has escaped a life sentence for murder. Relations between the EU and Brazil are based on trust, inasmuch as there is a respect for democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Raising criminals to the status of political refugee cannot be accepted.

Corina Crețu (S&D). – *(RO)* Mr President, I consider that respect for judicial independence – a fundamental standard shared by the European Union and Brazil – should take precedence over all other considerations. I firmly believe that the excellent relations between the two sides at both an economic and political level will be backed up by equally good cooperation on judicial matters, so that Cesare Battisti, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for four murders and other crimes, will serve his sentence under the law which governs him.

There is a bilateral extradition treaty between Brazil and Italy. As such, we must address an appeal to Brazil to respect this agreement. As the controversy has a high-level political aspect, I believe that dialogue should be initiated at this level with the new Brazilian head of state.

Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am slightly surprised by the number of Members here in the Chamber for a Thursday afternoon. As someone who attends every Thursday afternoon, I find the sudden interest in human rights issues quite extraordinary.

I would have welcomed this, had I not noticed that those attending are mostly Italian Members, who do not usually take an interest in human rights and who are, for that matter, often the first to ...

(Protests)

My dear fellow Member, would you like to make yourself clear? Then please speak into the microphone and I will answer you. That is what you would call a personal accusation. You are Italian, I am French, I respect you as an Italian. Anyone can see that there are, after all, a majority of Italian Members in the House, which, for a Thursday afternoon, is unusual to say the least. I am here every Thursday afternoon myself, sir! Every Thursday afternoon, I am here in plenary!

(Heckling)

Let me have quiet to speak! I am not in the habit of interrupting my fellow Members and I do not tolerate being interrupted! Mr President, may I please have my allotted time?

(The President asked the speaker to continue)

I have also noticed that, generally speaking, Italian Members are the first to ask that their democracy be respected and that no one interfere in Italian affairs. That is a fact. You only have to read the European Parliament debates to realise that. We are not here to find out whether Cesare Battisti is guilty or not guilty. I know –and I am speaking to you now – that the Years of Lead are a difficult period for Italians to come to terms with. I do know that. I know that there were many victims. However, I also know that not all those guilty of terrorist attacks were tried in Italy. I repeat: not all those guilty of terrorist attacks were tried in Italy!

(Heckling)

Could you please let me speak without interrupting me? You would think that we were in a national parliament! This is not how things are done in the European Parliament! Mr President, would it be possible to speak without being interrupted?

(The President asked the speaker to conclude)

I believe we have no business, on a Thursday afternoon, interfering in relations between Brazil and Italy. We are here to ensure that the right to justice is observed, I fully agree with that, but then let us give the Brazilian Supreme Court time to issue its ruling. The matter is now before the Brazilian courts, the Supreme Court has yet to issue its ruling, this issue does not come under ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

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

– (FR) Mr President, it is my custom to respect my fellow Members and I am prepared to answer the question. I would very much like them to show the same tolerance towards me.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, if you respect your fellow Members, Mrs Vergiat, you absolutely should not dare to say that your Italian fellow Members are never interested in human rights.

I have been here for 16 years. You can check the record of my work in Parliament, and I certainly do not deserve to be lectured on human rights by you.

On behalf of my fellow Members, we should like to ask whether or not you are ashamed to raise doubts about these four people?

Do you know what jobs these people did? They were very humble people. One was a security guard, one was a butcher, another a trader and another an agent of the public security forces.

Yesterday, the children of these people, who were between 10 and 15 years' old at the time, told us that every single day, they remember their fathers in a pool of blood. Do you really think it is appropriate to pick fights?

Marie-Christine Vergiat, *author.* – (FR) Mr President, I regard this as a question in the form of a personal accusation. No, I am not ashamed, Mrs Angelilli, because I made a point of saying that I thought that the Years of Lead were difficult years for Italy. I do think that the Years of Lead were difficult years for Italy! I know how many victims there were in Italy. I have taken a personal interest in this period.

Therefore, no, I am not ashamed. I am not questioning the victims; I am questioning the use, by Italian Members, of a Thursday afternoon sitting reserved for human rights issues to debate an issue which strictly concerns Italy and Brazil. I think – and I hope that the Commissioner will also respond in this way – that the European Union has no business interfering in affairs between Italy and Brazil; that is not its role. These sittings are reserved for human rights! What is more, Mrs Angelilli, I have not lectured you on this matter!

President. – I shall accept no more blue card questions. We have had the arguments and we have had the counter-arguments. (We now move to the next speaker.)

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am raising a point of order which is based on the Rule in relation to the composition of the agenda. I should just like to point out that this issue is on the agenda as a result of a decision taken by the Conference of Presidents which was then ratified by a vote in plenary last Monday.

It is not on the agenda due to the wishes of the Italian Members. It is an official act requested first by the Conference of Presidents and then by all of Parliament.

(Applause)

Oreste Rossi (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the European Union really must ensure that the treaty signed between Brazil and Italy, which aims to regulate the terms and procedures of cooperation in matters of extradition, is respected.

The Brazilian Supreme Court has granted the extradition of Cesare Battisti, who has been found guilty in some seven trials and sentenced in absentia to four life sentences for as many murders, with definitive judgments issued by the Italian judicial authorities. Incredibly, the outgoing President of Brazil has refused to deliver this criminal to Italy. Furthermore, in an act of extreme contempt for our country, a group of left-wing Brazilian members of parliament went to visit Cesare Battisti in prison and took photos of themselves celebrating with him.

The European Union, which has excellent commercial and economic relations with Brazil, cannot but intervene to enforce the law and the right of the victims' relatives to justice. Just yesterday, the victims' relatives met Members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, who – for once – were all in agreement, irrespective of their political affiliation.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission is fully aware of the outgoing Brazilian President's recent decision to refuse extradition of an Italian citizen, Mr Battisti, sentenced in absentia to a life sentence and several other terms of prison by the Italian court.

I have taken due note of your views on this particular case, and I share your feelings towards the victims and their families. However, the Commission considers that there is no scope for its involvement in this case. The European Union has not concluded any extradition agreement with Brazil and, even if this had been the case, it would have no right to intervene in individual extradition cases. A decision on extradition between European Union Member States, or between European Union Member States and third states, are entirely the preserve of the judiciary.

Italy's relations with Brazil on criminal cooperation are governed by a bilateral extradition treaty concluded in 1989. The Brazilian authorities have used their discretionary power within the law to refuse extradition of Mr Battisti.

I would like to add, in no uncertain terms: in the case of extradition, I have no doubts that Italian justice delivers the high standards expected of European Union Member States.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place shortly.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Ana Gomes (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am against the initiative of this resolution, because I believe that the case of Cesare Battisti's extradition does not have a place in a debate in this House on urgent cases of 'Breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law', simply because it does not represent a breach of human rights, democracy or the rule of law in Brazil and also because it is not an urgent matter. This is a legal and political dispute between Brazil and Italy and a decision by the Supreme Federal Court of Brazil is pending. At this time, this House should be sending two other messages to Brazil: one of solidarity regarding the disaster in which more than 700 people lost their lives, and one of delight on account of the democratic election of President Dilma Rousseff. Brazil is, without doubt, a democratic country that has made significant progress in political, civil, social, economic and cultural affairs in the last decade and is a model in the fight against poverty and hunger, thanks to the government's Zero Hunger and Family Allowance programmes.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE), in writing. – The rule of law must be upheld. The credibility of public institutions depends on it. Brazilian President Lula was authorised by the Brazilian Supreme Court to extradite Cesare Battisti, an Italian citizen convicted of four murders, among other charges. On 31 December 2009, President Lula's last day in office, he refused to extradite Battisti to Italy. I expect the Brazilian authorities to make an apolitical unbiased final decision; a decision that upholds the rule of law. The rule of law is fundamental to Brazilian-EU relations. Our treaties are founded on the principles of human rights and fairness. I trust these principles to remain mutual.

11.3. Iran, in particular, the case of Nasrin Sotoudeh

President. – The next item is the debate on seven motions for resolutions on Iran, in particular, the case of Nasrin Sotoudeh ⁽³⁾.

Bastiaan Belder, author. – (NL) Mr President, exactly one week ago, Nobel Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi, published a penetrating article in The Wall Street Journal about her friend, the Iranian human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, who had just been sentenced to eleven years' imprisonment. Ebadi called for the West to pay greater attention to the Sotoudeh case and to all the brave human rights defenders in the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The debate in this House is part of the response to Ebadi's urgent appeal. We cannot and shall not forget Nasrin Sotoudeh, nor her fellow fighters for fundamental rights in Iran. That will also be the message, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, of the report that I hope to present on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs at the plenary sitting in March, and I count on all of you to vote in favour of it. A powerful, united European voice for the rights of the Iranian people.

Marietje Schaake, author. – Mr President, once again, we are forced to speak about human rights in Iran, after Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced to 11 years in jail. She is banned from practising law, but let us serve justice.

The Rule of Law is no longer practised or existent in Iran, and the judiciary is highly politicised. Defending human rights is now considered an act against national security. Nasrin Sotoudeh, lawyer and mother of two, is charged with acting against national security. She defended, among others, Zahra Bahrami, an Iranian-Dutch citizen who was sentenced to death before Dutch diplomats had talked to her, and in a climate of serious doubts about due process.

As strong a woman as Nasrin Sotoudeh is and was, by standing for justice, we see a weak regime that represses its citizens instead of providing for their wellbeing. High Representative Ashton will be in Istanbul later this month in an attempt to bring the Iranian regime to cooperate with the international community on the nuclear issue. Economic sanctions have the same aim. I doubt they will render the desired result before disproportionately hurting the people of Iran who, as a result, become more and more dependent on the hard-line government.

However, while I am sceptical about the impact of economic sanctions, I am confident that sanctions against individuals responsible for violating human rights through, for example, censorship, rape, torture and executions, will be an effective and necessary step

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to end impunity and to honour the justice that Nasrin Sotoudeh stood for. Human rights are clearly the Achilles heel of the Iranian regime.

Mr President, while I have the floor, may I ask you to encourage our Italian colleagues to be quiet because it is really distracting when they start speaking in the Chamber after their business has been dealt with.

President. – Colleagues, you heard the request made by Mrs Schaake. Other colleagues have also asked if you could be quiet. If you have something private to discuss, you can do so outside.

Struan Stevenson, *author.* – Mr President, it was my intention today to compare the Islamic Republic of Iran to Nazi Germany but I have to say that I think in many ways, it can be even worse. The mullahs have hanged 65 people so far this year. Ten were hanged yesterday: first, they were heavily fined and had their homes confiscated, and then each was mercilessly flogged before being dragged to the gallows. Eighty-seven people have been hanged in the past four weeks.

Ahmadinejad is a holocaust denier and a hater of the Jews; he says he wants to wipe Israel off the map and he is now building nuclear weapons that will enable him to do so. He and Khamenei preside over the ruthless suppression of the citizens of Iran, with hangings, torture, stoning to death, amputations and floggings all commonplace, and the execution of children, and even pregnant women, routine. Two prisoners in Mashhad had their hands amputated this week; two others have been sentenced to amputation and these verdicts will be carried out soon.

Anyone who tries to expose this evil is immediately targeted. Nasrin Sotoudeh is a case in point: a courageous human rights lawyer who has defended many of the innocent people unjustly sentenced and executed by this fascist regime. Her outrageous sentence of 11 years' imprisonment for doing her job is an insult to humanity. The real criminals are the tyrants in Tehran and they will be held to account. They believe that their critics in the West are part of an international conspiracy to topple their regime. Well, I for one would sign up to that project today. Evil must never be allowed to prevail, and the sooner we can see freedom, democracy, humanity and women's rights restored to Iran, the better it will be for the whole world.

Rosario Crocetta, *author.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, by asking for the immediate release of Nasrin Sotoudeh, we are urging the Union and its Member States to do more to liberate Iranian citizens and the world from one of the cruellest and most authoritarian regimes in history.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is characterised not only by the threat it poses to world peace with a nuclear project capable of evoking the terror of nuclear war, but also by the illegitimacy of its elections; mass arrests of people requesting free elections; the killing of objectors; the rape and physical abuse of those who do not support the regime; the iniquity of judicial processes, where decisions can be predicted as soon as the accusations have been made; serious discrimination against women and homosexuals; and the absence of freedom of expression and of association. The conditions of Iranian prisoners in Camp Ashraf, where they are subjected to violence and even stoning, are absolutely incredible.

Every day, at least two people, including children, are sentenced to death in Iran, and they are guilty of nothing more than of not pleasing the regime. Legal evidence is often created through the cruel and skilful use of brutal methods of torture. These criticisms are certainly

not aimed at Islam, which is based on peace, but at the Iranian regime. The arrest and conviction of Nasrin Sotoudeh bring to light a new level of judicial deceit, since in this case, the attack and conviction are against a defender of the people, which means that citizens of Iran cannot even defend themselves.

Cristian Dan Preda, *author.* – (RO) Mr President, while Iran might be starting to open up on nuclear matters, we unfortunately must conclude that the door is clearly closed in this country when it comes to human rights.

The case of Nasrin Sotoudeh demonstrates this completely. She was punished for her work in support of human rights with an extremely harsh sentence: 11 years, banned from practising as a lawyer for 20 years and from leaving the country. This verdict was reached following a mockery of a trial.

This case is far from an isolated incident. It is part of a deliberate strategy by the Iranian regime to systematically silence human rights activists. A whole series of very harsh sentences are targeted at lawyers who are active in human rights matters, and we must show solidarity with these courageous people who support and take action on human rights in spite of threats, torture and imprisonment.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *author.* – Mr President, I have to say that I deeply deplore the fact that we once more have to talk about Iran, but we have to. We really have to because the situation in Iran is gravely problematic and dramatic.

That is why it is important that this Parliament reiterates once again its call for the release of all prisoners of conscience, including all those who have been detained over the last year in connection with their peaceful – and I repeat, peaceful – political and human rights activities. This Parliament has to call again on the Iranian authorities to respect the internationally recognised rights to freedom of expression and assembly, and strongly condemn the extraordinarily harsh sentence against Nasrin Sotoudeh and to commend her for her courage and her engagement.

This is also why this Parliament has to consider Mrs Sotoudeh, as well as her fellow human rights activists and prisoners of conscience, and demand her immediate release. We have to express our concern over the ever more frequently imposed sentence of a ban on leaving Iran, which can lead to the logical conclusion that staying in Iran is considered a punishment by the authorities.

We have to call on the authorities to combat the impunity of human rights violators within the security forces and also reiterate our demand for an independent investigation into allegations of extra-judicial executions since June's disputed presidential elections and for alleged violators to be brought to justice. Evidently, we also have to strongly condemn the bomb attack in Chabahar and to express our condolences to the victims' families and the injured.

Finally, I should like to say that we are seriously concerned about the persecution of certain religions and ethnic groups in Iran. We have to express our conviction, supported by recent European history, that peaceful and balanced social and political development can only be achieved by taking the cultural and social aspirations of differing regions into account.

Bogusław Sonik, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (PL) Mr President, Nasrin Sotoudeh gave us reason to talk about her in a previous European Parliament debate on the lack of protection of human rights in Iran, when, on 4 September 2010, she was arrested on

charges of propaganda against the state, conspiracy and assembling to act against national security. She has been held for four months. Now, following a trial, this distinguished human rights defender and dedicated co-worker of Nobel Laureate, Shirin Ebadi, has been sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment followed by a 20-year ban on practising law and leaving Iran. Let us remember that long prison sentences have also been handed down to other political prisoners. The 26-year-old women's rights activist, Shiva Nazar Ahari, has been sentenced to four years in prison and 74 lashes for the same crime.

We need to emphasise clearly our opposition to flagrant violations of what are fundamental human rights: freedom of association, freedom of expression, the right to freedom of thought and the right to a fair trial. Nasrin Sotoudeh, who has devoted her life to the fight to defend human rights – defending minors who have been sentenced to death and people accused of causing peaceful protests as well as working closely with the opposition – has become living proof of the human rights violations in Iran. The European Union cannot continue to be a passive observer of this uneven fight on the part of Iranian society against the regime.

Corina Crețu, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (RO) Mr President, we also support the demands for the immediate and unconditional release of Nasrin Sotoudeh and all prisoners of conscience in Iran. After the electoral fraud that kept the Ahmadinejad regime in power, thousands of Iranians paid the price of freedom for their courage in protesting against an increasingly repressive regime. Nasrin Sotoudeh was sentenced, after months of isolation and torture, to 11 years in prison because, as a lawyer and campaigner for human rights, she defended opponents of the Tehran government, including a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Along with numerous dissidents, dozens of journalists and bloggers who dared to exercise their basic freedom to express their own conscience are also suffering ill treatment in Iranian prisons. I believe that the European Union's commitment to the release of these fighters for democracy should not only take the form of public protest, but also of concrete steps from the European External Action Service, with a view to mobilising the international community to exert increased common pressure to end these human rights violations in Iran.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – Mr President, we should never forget in this House that the freedom to debate and dissent that we so much enjoy in Europe is scarce and non-existent in many parts of the world. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Iran.

Yet again in this House, we find ourselves discussing the appalling human rights situation in that Islamic Republic. As a lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh has helped many opposition supporters who were detained and harassed following the rigged presidential election 18 months ago. She has also represented minors on death row, truly a heroic job in a country that executes children with alacrity. She was arrested in September last year on charges of spreading propaganda and conspiring to harm state security. Now she has been sentenced to 11 years in prison and banned from practising law for 20 years.

She should be released immediately and unconditionally. I call upon the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to make that point.

Parliament and Commission have been resolute in highlighting the human rights abuses of the brutal – almost disgusting – Ahmadinejad regime. It is time that the Council put the

EU's common values ahead of Member States' individual commercial interests in that country.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we are tackling yet another debate on the violation of human rights and democracy in Iran. This time, it is the case of a lawyer who protects human rights activists in Iran.

Indeed, the idea is to solve the problem at source by no longer merely imprisoning people who fight for their rights, but to go directly to those that defend them, just to show which way the wind is blowing for those who wish to oppose the Ahmadinejad regime.

I would place a bet today, Mr President, that in a few weeks' time, we will be back in this Chamber to speak about another different case of all basic rights being violated in Iran. The violation will be disguised by some criminal motive that would be laughable were it not so tragic, such as acting against national security or propaganda against the regime, as in the case we are discussing today.

I really do wonder, Mr President, whether Parliament should continue to have a delegation for relations with a regime that is the exact opposite of everything the European Union is founded on.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, once again, we have an appalling situation coming out of Iran. Prior to Christmas, we discussed the situation of Sakineh Ashtiani, who was condemned to death by stoning for alleged adultery, a sentence subsequently commuted to death by hanging for alleged murder. Today, we have the unfortunate situation of Nasrin Sotoudeh, who has been condemned to 11 years in jail for doing her job. She has had her assets frozen and has been denied access to her own lawyer. Her husband was arrested during the week for – and I quote – ‘spreading lies and disrupting public opinion’. Figure that one out!

I think all we can do is use our influence to the best of our ability to try and bring an end to this evil madness, particularly the maltreatment and disrespect of women. Those two examples have been cases in point.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – *(RO)* Mr President, the conviction of human rights activist, Nasrin Sotoudeh, reflects the fragility of the respect for human rights in Iran. Since the controversial re-election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2009, all protests have been brutally suppressed, thousands of citizens arrested and several hundred have already been convicted.

The harsh punishment received by Nasrin Sotoudeh of 11 years in prison resulted from the fact that, as a lawyer, she had defended numerous opponents of the regime who had been arrested during the demonstrations following the presidential elections. Moreover, she was reprimanded for interviews given to the foreign press during this period. We can see here a typical case of the violation of the right to freedom of expression, of the right of lawyers to practise their profession without pressure or duress, and also of the right of a defendant to an impartial trial.

In this context, I would remind the Commission and the Council that any cooperation between the European Union and Iran needs to start from the premise that respect for human rights is an absolute must.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, this is another matter which outrages European public opinion and which outrages the Members of this House. If we keep seeing situations in the same country which evidently violate human rights, we need to think about the structure and responsibility of that country. It can be seen clearly that respect for one's own traditions and customs does not, however, go together with the acceptance of certain declared standards or European standards – I am thinking, here, of human rights. That is obvious. It is good that the European Parliament has taken up this matter. There is still a question, however, about political pressure, because that is, as it were, the next matter on which the European Parliament speaks, when we are talking about Iran, and is not achieving any great success. Perhaps it is necessary to begin applying pressure which is very much stronger than at present.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, activists and advocates fighting for human rights in Iran have long been persecuted and detained, and the verdict against the lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, comprises a sad example of this persecution.

The Iranian regime has done the same to the activist, Shiva Nazar Ahari, the lawyer, Mohammad Seifzadeh, and the advocate, Mohammad Oliyafar. Other activists are threatened with a similar fate.

Repression in Iran continues to get worse, and our attempts to improve the situation have no effect. The action of the government against those who have reservations about the regime has now reached such a level that we must seriously begin to consider a change of policy towards this country and to consider other possibilities for more effective pressure on the Iranian administration so that we can help the Iranian people to breathe more freely. It will surely not be easy, but I believe it is our responsibility to try and change the situation in Iran.

Sari Essayah (PPE). – (FI) Mr President, Nasrin Sotoudeh is one of the best known human rights lawyers in Iran and she defended Shirin Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, among others. Her clients have also included underage persons who have been sentenced to death and the victims of family violence. Her only crime is that she was practising her profession, which is defending people unable to defend themselves against Iran's brutal regime.

The unrest following the elections in 2009 and their consequences have resulted in the Iranian authorities taking harsh measures against human rights defenders and activists. It is the aim of the Iranian Government to silence all opposition once and for all both inside and outside the country.

This Parliament has appealed on behalf of the people in Ahvaz, for example, and submitted a unanimous written declaration on the matter. It is strange that the international community can do nothing to get rid of this barbarous regime.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D). – (PL) Mr President, during the last debate on human rights violations in Iran, which took place in this Chamber barely four months ago, I said in my speech that five Iranian citizens every day are told they are soon to lose their lives under sentence of capital punishment. To this tragic statistic must also be added the sentences of many years in prison for Iranian lawyers who defend the victims of the country's justice system. Those last two words should probably be put in inverted commas. Forty seven year-old Nasrin Sotoudeh, who was arrested on 4 September, tortured and who has now been sentenced to 11 years in prison, is an example of this.

Other Iranian lawyers have also met with repression. Shiva Nazar Ahari, co-founder of the Committee of Human Rights Reporters, has been given a sentence of four years in prison, Mohammad Seifzadeh has been given nine years in prison and a ban on practising law for 10 years, and Mohammad Oliyafar has received a year in prison just for representing his clients in court. I think that by using the negotiating position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, we should press for the subject of human rights defenders to be included in talks with Iran as a matter of urgency.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, the case of the lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, is very serious. She has received 11 years in prison, has been banned from practising law and from leaving the country for 20 years. What has she done? She has defended Shirin Ebadi, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, other political and human rights activists, journalists and minors sentenced to the death penalty.

Since 2009, at least 15 human rights lawyers have received prison sentences in Iran. Through such measures, Iran violates fundamental human rights and fundamental UN principles for the role of a lawyer. I urge the Commission and the Council to intervene for the immediate release of the lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, the European Union remains extremely concerned about the grave and deteriorating situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Over the last two years, conditions have gone from being difficult to being near impossible for those who work to defend human rights.

For Nasrin Sotoudeh and many others like her who work to defend the just causes of fundamental rights and freedom, working from jail is not an option. The impact of her arrest is clear: those in Iran who are brave enough to stand up for those whom the state itself is supposed to protect risk being intimidated, imprisoned or worse.

The European Union has been speaking out; more than ten statements were released in 2010 by High Representative and Vice-President Ashton on both the general situation and on individual cases. At the same time, the European Union undertook discreet demarches with the Iranian authorities seeking clarifications and explanations, and conveying clear messages on the need to improve the situation in Iran. A statement on Nasrin Sotoudeh's case was made by High Representative and Vice-President Ashton on 14 January 2011, which mentioned both Ms Sotoudeh and Ms Shiva Nazar Ahari, a lawyer and a journalist, sentenced respectively to eleven and four years in prison.

The Islamic Republic of Iran was recently elected to the membership of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Mrs Sotoudeh and Ms Ahari are two women who have been deprived of the very rights they were fighting to protect. The European Union will continue reminding the Iranian authorities that, first and foremost, they must comply with those international obligations stemming from the multilateral agreements and conventions they have signed and ratified. We will continue seeking ways to make our action in defence of human rights more effective, using all the means at our disposal. The Iranian people deserve no less.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, we have a completely superfluous working group here in Parliament whose job it is to look at ways of making the plenary sessions more interesting. This group would have done well to study today's plenary. All we need is sufficient time, which is why we should also be allowed time on Thursday afternoons.

We also need the right President in the chair, who can exercise a judicious measure of rigour and flexibility. This will produce a lively and interesting plenary.

(Applause)

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place shortly.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), in writing. – (FI) The situation of active human rights defenders in Iran is becoming ever more difficult. In addition, we read about the increasing number of death sentences. The Dutch national, Zahra Bahrami, who had been mentioned in our hurried resolutions previously, was sentenced to death, and her lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, received an 11 year prison sentence ‘for acting against national security’.

As we know, the hallmark of Iran’s legal system is a serious lack of justice and transparency. It is therefore important that the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy does not let the country off the hook, but continues to raise human rights issues in relations with Iran. Let me list the minimum requirements: the immediate and unconditional release of human rights lawyer Sotoudeh and other prisoners of conscience, Bahrami’s death sentence to be reconsidered and the Dutch authorities to be included in handling the case, allowing representatives of the Red Cross to meet with prisoners, and letting human rights organisations into the country to assess the situation.

Róża Gräfin von Thun und Hohenstein (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The European Parliament must react to cases of human rights violations. We have to remember that thanks to the publicising of specific cases, the international community can exert greater pressure on countries which do not respect generally accepted democratic standards. Nasrin Sotoudeh represented Iranian civil and human rights activists at their trials and defended minors who had been sentenced to capital punishment. The Iranian authorities considered her activities to be ‘spreading hostile propaganda’ and sentenced her to 11 years in prison. It is a good thing that her case has appeared on the agenda of a plenary sitting of the European Parliament. The European Parliament, when it calls for the release of Nasrin Sotoudeh and other prisoners of conscience, and also for the establishment of an independent commission to examine the prosecution of human rights defenders, should not be ignored.

12. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

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

12.1. Pakistan: murder of the Governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer (B7-0041/2011) (vote)

– *Before the vote:*

Marietje Schaake (ALDE). – Mr President, very briefly: the new text in paragraph 8 should be added after the appeal at the end of the paragraph, and in paragraph 17 it was

agreed to delete 'ratify fully and without' and replace it by 'withdraw the reservations on'. These are simply factual changes to the text.

(The oral amendments were accepted)

– Before the vote on paragraph 14:

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, I would like to change paragraph 14 to the following: 'Reiterates its call to the government of Pakistan to carry out a thoroughgoing review of the blasphemy laws and their current application, including the mandatory death penalty or life imprisonment prescribed by Section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code for anyone found guilty of blasphemy against the prophet Mohammed, with a view to implementing amendments as suggested by the Federal Minister for Minority Affairs'.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

12.2. Brazil: extradition of Cesare Battisti (B7-0042/2011) (vote)

12.3. Iran, in particular, the case of Nasrin Sotoudeh (B7-0043/2011) (vote)

13. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

14. Council position at first reading: see Minutes

15. Decisions concerning certain documents: see Minutes

16. Written declarations included in the register (Rule 123): see Minutes

17. Forwarding of texts adopted during the sitting: see Minutes

Robert Sturdy (ECR). – Mr President, we have just had two roll-call votes. This morning before lunch, we had only two roll-call votes. It is the ruling in this Parliament that you have to vote over 50% of the time, and 50% of the roll-call votes, to ensure that you get a full day's pay. Is this correct in this case, or what is the situation?

President. – It is correct. You have to be present 50% of the time.

18. Dates of forthcoming sittings: see Minutes

19. Closure of the sitting

President. – I declare adjourned the session of the European Parliament.

(The sitting was closed at 17:00)

ANNEX (Written answers)

QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL (The Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union bears sole responsibility for these answers)

Question no 1 by Bernd Posselt (H-0618/10)

Subject: Linguistic and cultural diversity

How does the Council view EU policy on promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, with particular regard to traditional ethnic groups and minorities?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The Council has been consistent in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity as well as intercultural dialogue in its policy making together with the Commission and the European Parliament. This policy is enshrined on:

the Treaty on the European Union which, in its Article 3(3), fourth subparagraph, sets out that the EU 'shall respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity'.

the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which, in its Article 167, sets out that the EU 'shall contribute to the flowering of cultures of the Member States while respecting their national and regional diversity...'. Furthermore, the EU also 'shall take cultural aspects into account in its action under other provisions of the Treaties, in particular, in order to respect and to promote diversity of its cultures'.

the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union which, in its Article 22, sets out that the EU 'shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity'.

the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions which has been ratified by the European Union. In one of the guiding principles of the Convention, it is stated that 'the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions presuppose (...) respect for all cultures, including the cultures of persons belonging to minorities (...)'.

In its 2007 Resolution on a European Agenda for Culture ⁽⁴⁾, the Council endorsed three strategic objectives, one of them being promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

This objective has been translated into a priority area in the Council's work plans for culture since 2002. In the latest Work Plan agreed for 2011-2014 ⁽⁵⁾, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue will, for the first time, be dealt with by a working group of the Member States experts.

(4) Resolution of the Council of 16 November 2007 on a European Agenda for Culture (OJ C 287, 29.11.2007, p. 1)

(5) Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the Work Plan for Culture 2011-2014 (OJ C 325, 2.12.2010, p. 1)

The Council designated the year 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. In the decision on designation ⁽⁶⁾, the Council stressed that intercultural dialogue is an important dimension in many Union policies and instruments in the fields such as youth, sport, citizenship, employment and social affairs, combating racism and xenophobia, combating discrimination and social exclusion, audiovisual policy and policy on asylum and the integration of immigrants.

The Council also has noted that the intercultural dialogue can help to bring individuals and peoples closer together, and help towards conflict prevention and the process of reconciliation, especially in regions which are facing politically precarious situations ⁽⁷⁾.

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Question no 2 by Jim Higgins (H-0620/10)

Subject: Hungarian Presidency

How does the Hungarian Presidency intend to achieve its aim of increased renewable energy and does the Presidency think that the EU 2020 strategy is sufficiently ambitious? Does the Presidency believe that the targets set out in the EU 2020 strategy are realistic? How will the Hungarian Presidency ensure Europe remains on the right path towards increasing renewable energy?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The efforts to achieve the targets for energy from renewable sources, which is a long-term challenge, are being made within the framework defined by the Directive on the promotion of energy from renewable sources ⁽⁸⁾. All Member States had time until last December to implement this directive. It sets binding targets for the share of renewable energy in energy consumption to be reached in 2020, allowing the EU jointly to achieve a 20% share of renewable, as reconfirmed in the Europe 2020 strategy.

These targets were carefully negotiated in order to get the most out of each Member State's potential and they represent a high level of ambition. Indeed, the level of ambition reflected in national targets is such that for certain Member States, it will not be possible to reach their targets without making full use of cooperation mechanisms, between Member States as well as with third countries, established by the directive. At the same time, the targets appear realistic, not only because of the cooperation mechanisms already mentioned, but also because of the possibility for Member States to continue with their national schemes to support renewable energy.

⁽⁶⁾ Decision No 1983/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) (OJ L 412, 30.12.2006, p. 44)

⁽⁷⁾ Draft conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in the external relations of the Union and its Member States, 16211/08

⁽⁸⁾ Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources and amending and subsequently repealing Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC (OJ L 140, 5.6.2009, p. 16)

The directive is not the only EU instrument that could and will contribute to steer Europe on the path towards increasing the share of renewable energy. Some initiatives to support the generation of energy from renewable sources are already in place, such as the large contribution of the European Energy Programme for Recovery⁽⁹⁾ to offshore wind energy. Key developments for the transport of renewable energy and the adaptation of networks through the roll-out of smart grids and smart metering will also be prioritised in 2011, as part of the EU Energy Strategy 2020⁽¹⁰⁾.

Last but not least, enhanced energy efficiency will be further promoted through the adoption of a reviewed Energy Efficiency Action Plan, which is a priority for the Hungarian Presidency.

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Question no 3 by Georgios Papanikolaou (H-0622/10)

Subject: New Presidency's programme concerning illegal immigration

The programme of the Hungarian Presidency makes particular reference to the problem of illegal immigration and the need to tackle it. Moreover, owing to Hungary's geographical position, great importance is attached to reviving the neighbourhood policy, part of which aims to achieve better cooperation between the EU and third countries in combating illegal immigration.

In what context and through which specific policies does the new Presidency intend to contribute to the effort to combat illegal immigration?

Does it intend to promote policies of cooperation with neighbouring countries from which large-scale immigration stems and, if so, in what way?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The Trio Presidency Programme prioritised the fight against illegal immigration and the Hungarian Presidency intends to build on the work of the Belgian and Spanish Presidencies in this field in keeping with the objectives set out in the Stockholm Programme⁽¹¹⁾, whereby effective action against illegal immigration is identified as essential in the context of developing a common immigration policy. The Stockholm Programme equally identifies an effective and sustainable return policy as an essential element of a well-managed migration system within the Union.

Concerning readmission agreements, the Hungarian Presidency will closely monitor the progress in the ongoing negotiations, notably with Turkey, Morocco and Cape Verde, as well as arranging for the launching of negotiations with Belarus. To that aim, and with a

⁽⁹⁾ Regulation (EC) No 663/2009 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 July 2009 establishing a programme to aid economic recovery by granting Community financial assistance to projects in the field of energy (OJ L 200, 31.7.2009, p. 31)

⁽¹⁰⁾ Energy 2020: A strategy for competitive, sustainable and secure energy; 16096/10; (COM(2010)693)

⁽¹¹⁾ OJ C 115, 4.5.2010, p. 1

view to defining a renewed and coherent strategy on readmission, the Presidency will focus on the Commission's forthcoming evaluation of readmission agreements.

Fostering practical cooperation among Member States will also be a key point in the Hungarian Presidency's programme in the field of illegal immigration, with special focus on the effective implementation of the Return Directive. In this regard, the work begun under the Belgian Presidency with regard to the issue of facilitating transit by land of third-country nationals who return voluntarily will be taken forward, thus providing humane solutions for the irregular migrants returning voluntarily to their home countries.

Furthermore, the question of illegally staying third-country nationals falling under the principle of 'non-refoulement' is also on the Presidency's agenda.

Finally, the Hungarian Presidency will pay attention to the EU-wide collection of statistical data on illegal migration. It is essential to have a full picture on all the data collected in this field, and make them available to the Member States, EU institutions and agencies

Finally, work on all aspects of the Global Approach to Migration ⁽¹²⁾ will be continued. Europe needs a global approach to migration policy, which should benefit society in the home as well as in the host country, and, of course, the migrants themselves. The Presidency believes that the global approach needs to be balanced thematically (including legal immigration, fight against irregular immigration and the promotion of migration and development) and geographically as well. The Hungarian Presidency attaches great importance to the further development of the Prague Process – Building Migration Partnerships ⁽¹³⁾ – directed to neighbouring eastern and south-eastern countries, by elaborating – jointly with the members of the Process – an Action Plan for the implementation of the Prague Declaration of April 2009 that would define the concrete objectives and activities required for the realisation of the goals set in the Declaration; including on preventing and fighting irregular immigration. The Hungarian Presidency will also focus on the preparations of the 2nd Ministerial Conference in November 2011. The aim of the ministerial conference will be to endorse the Action Plan.

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Question no 4 by Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (H-0624/10)

Subject: Protection of child victims of trafficking

The Stockholm Programme adopted by the Council contains the principal measures relating to prevention, the application of the law and protection of victims in combating trafficking in human beings. Particular attention should be devoted to protecting children. As children are the most vulnerable members of society, enormous efforts should be made to protect them.

Children are sold to perform forced labour or engage in illegal activities. They are also trafficked for purposes of illegal organ donation.

In order to improve the coordination of European policy on combating trafficking in human beings, the Council has decided to appoint a European Union anti-trafficking coordinator. Can the Council indicate whether this coordinator will also be responsible

⁽¹²⁾ Council doc. 15811/09

⁽¹³⁾ Council doc. 15876/10

for combating trafficking in children? What specific measures does the coordinator appointed intend to adopt to protect child victims?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, referred to in the question, is a Commission official, recently appointed by the Commission. Consequently, the Council is not competent to answer the question.

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Question no 5 by Nikolaos Chountis (H-0635/10)

Subject: Need to provide emergency aid for Haiti

The catastrophic earthquake which struck Haiti in January 2010 cost thousands of lives and left an unbearable economic and social situation in the country, which was one of the poorest in the world even before the earthquake. Humanitarian organisations report that, several months after the earthquake, bodies had not been pulled out of the ruins, the sanitary conditions of the population were appalling and humanitarian aid conspicuous by its absence. A cholera epidemic was the logical outcome. The thousands of confirmed victims are adding to the ever-lengthening list of those killed in the earthquake. According to UN (OCHA) information, there is, as usual, a great discrepancy between the aid 'promised' and the aid actually delivered.

How much has the EU promised to send to Haiti and how much has it actually delivered to date? What further efforts does the Presidency of the Council intend to make in order to help the millions of people who continue to die in Haiti without aid?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) As the honourable Member is aware, the EU has been at the forefront in responding to both the consequences of the earthquake of 12 January 2010 and the outbreak of the cholera epidemic at the end of October. In coordination with international partners, the EU and its Member States took immediate steps to help the victims by rapidly providing humanitarian emergency assistance and deploying humanitarian and civil protection experts.

At the International Donors' Conference for the reconstruction of Haiti, held in New York on 31 March 2010, the EU presented a joint pledge of EUR 1.235 billion out of a total amount of USD 5.3 billion pledged by all international donors for the period of 18 months, which has made the EU Haiti's main donor. After the conference, an additional amount of EUR 62 million out of the EU budget was added, which makes in total EUR 522 million earmarked from the EU budget. So far, the Commission has committed EUR 322 million, out of which EUR 115.4 million have already been contracted, and EUR 62 million disbursed. In addition, the Commission has disbursed a total amount of EUR 57.8 million

through general budget support since the earthquake, allowing the Haitian Government to maintain critical expenditure, notably in education, health and security⁽¹⁴⁾. Moreover, in support of the long-term reconstruction plan for Haiti and in the context of a joint EU approach linking relief to rehabilitation and development, the EU and Member States are currently in the final stage of identifying common priorities, together with the Haitian Government, with a view to adopting a joint programming document at the beginning of 2011.

In response to the cholera epidemic, the Commission has mobilised EUR 12 million to support DG ECHO partners on the ground, in addition to generous in-cash and in-kind contributions from the Member States. Due to the deteriorating situation in Haiti, the Commission has proposed to the budgetary authorities to scale up its humanitarian assistance with an additional EUR 10 million by transferring appropriations within the humanitarian aid part of the EU budget for 2010.

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Question no 6 by Gay Mitchell (H-0644/10)

Subject: Recognition of a Palestinian State

What consideration has been given by the Council to the recognition of a Palestinian State?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) With respect to the consideration given by the Council to the recognition of a Palestinian State, the Council, while recalling the Berlin Declaration of 1999, reiterated at its meeting of 13 December 2010 its readiness, when appropriate, to recognise a Palestinian State.

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Question no 7 by Silvia-Adriana Țicău (H-0646/10)

Subject: Adoption and implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

On 8 December, the Council adopted the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) and the related Action Plan. The added value thereof resides in the fact that the Member States are able to avail themselves jointly of existing funding, giving greater priority to strategic projects for the Danube region, and take advantage of the mid-term review of the Financial Perspective to review also the Operational Programmes, so as to earmark the funding necessary for projects forming part of the EUSDR Action Plan. The Hungarian Council Presidency has announced that the adoption and implementation of this strategy is a priority for its term of office.

⁽¹⁴⁾ State of play on 24 November 2010, based on DG ECHO information

Can the Hungarian Presidency indicate what measures are being projected by the EU Council for the adoption and implementation of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region for the first half of 2011?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The EU Strategy for the Danube Region, adopted by the European Commission on 8 December 2010 following a request from Member States, takes the form of a Communication ⁽¹⁵⁾ and an attached http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/danube/documents/communication/action_plan_danube.pdf ⁽¹⁶⁾, which will be reviewed regularly. The Strategy identifies pillars and priority areas focusing on improving transport and energy connections, the environment, socio-economic development and security.

The intention of the Hungarian Presidency is to submit the Strategy for endorsement by the Council in April 2011, and to the European Council in June 2011. The examination of the Strategy by Council preparatory bodies is envisaged to start in January 2011.

Implementation of the strategy is mainly a prerogative for the European Commission, and will start immediately after endorsement by Member States in June 2011. Throughout its term, the Presidency will give special attention to the start-up of the new strategy while maintaining close links with the institutions and other stakeholders concerned by intending to jointly elaborate a guidance on the tasks of the priority area coordinators in relation to the start-up as well as on how the existing funds shall be coordinated.

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Question no 8 by Liam Aylward (H-0647/10)

Subject: Farm safety in the EU

Death rates in the farming sector are far too high. In Ireland, for instance, 23 people have died on farms so far this year. A study on this issue has shown that the risk of death in the workplace is 10 times higher in the case of farmers and that, although farmers represent only around 6% of the total population, more than 60% of deaths in the workplace occur among the farming community.

What can be done at EU level to reduce the number of farm deaths and accidents?

⁽¹⁵⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 'European Union Strategy for Danube Region' (COM(2010) 715 final), 18055/10

⁽¹⁶⁾ Accompanying document to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: 'European Union Strategy for Danube Region' (SEC(2010) 1489 final), 18055/10 ADD1

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) Council Directive 89/392/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work ('Framework Directive') ⁽¹⁷⁾ applies to all employers and workers, in all sectors of activity. In particular, agriculture is included in the scope of the directive, as is stated in Article 2(1). According to the directive, the employer shall have a duty to ensure the safety and health of the workers in every aspect related to the work (Article 5(1)), including prevention of occupational risks and provision of information and training, as well as provision of the necessary organisation and means (Article 6(1)). The principle of the responsibility of the employer is not affected by the fact that each worker also has a responsibility to take care, as far as possible, of his own safety and health and that of other persons (Articles 4(3) and 13(1)).

In its Conclusions on the Community Strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work ⁽¹⁸⁾, the Council called on the Member States, among other things, to ensure better and more effective enforcement of legislation and to take appropriate steps to provide adequate resources for labour inspectorates and to give particular attention to new employment trends, such as the increase in self-employment, outsourcing, subcontracting, migrant workers and posted workers. At the same time, the Council called on the Commission to continue to monitor and support the implementation of legislation in all Member States.

While other directives are already in force in the field of health and safety of workers, such as Directives on work equipment ⁽¹⁹⁾, noise ⁽²⁰⁾, or biological agents ⁽²¹⁾, the Council may only examine a new text on the basis of a legislative proposal by the Commission.

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Question no 9 by Pat the Cope Gallagher (H-0652/10)**Subject: Liechtenstein and the Schengen Area**

What is the current status of the procedure to ratify a protocol allowing Liechtenstein formally to join the Schengen Area?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The honourable Member of the European Parliament is informed that the Council is currently awaiting the consent of the European Parliament on the conclusion of the

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ L 183, 29.6.1989, p. 1

⁽¹⁸⁾ See doc. 9353/07

⁽¹⁹⁾ Directive 89/654/EEC, OJ L 393 of 30.12.1989, p. 1

⁽²⁰⁾ Directive 2003/10/EC, OJ L 42, of 15.2.2003, p. 38

⁽²¹⁾ Directive 2000/54/EC, OJ L 262, of 17.10.2000, p. 21

Protocol ⁽²²⁾, which would allow the Principality of Liechtenstein to join the Schengen area.

While the European Parliament had been consulted and approved the conclusion of the Protocol on 8 July 2008, it became necessary, following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, to resubmit the Protocol to the European Parliament for consent, which was done by the Council on 28 May 2010 ⁽²³⁾.

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Question no 10 by Brian Crowley (H-0654/10)

Subject: Sustainable economic growth and job creation

What initiatives will the Presidency introduce over the coming months to support sustainable economic growth and job creation in the European Union?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) Supporting the economy is one of the cornerstones of the Presidency's work programme for the coming six months, a period which marks the very first 'European semester' for economic policy coordination. In this sense, a comprehensive and coherent approach will be taken to the budgetary, macro-economic and growth- and employment-oriented policies of both Member States and the EU itself, in order to ensure both that financial stability is safeguarded and that all economic policies are conducive to strong and sustainable employment-creating growth.

Moreover, key objectives and initiatives were presented by the Council to the December European Council on implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy ⁽²⁴⁾. These should be reflected in the national reform programmes and may include the five EU headline targets relating to employment, research and development, energy/climate change, education and combating poverty and social exclusion, as well as the way in which the Member States should set and pursue their national targets, including the need to accelerate reforms addressing identified bottlenecks to growth. Member States will submit their national reform programmes in support of the objectives and targets established in the Europe 2020 strategy by April 2011, alongside frontload key growth enhancing structural reforms.

The Single Market, as a driver of growth, is of crucial importance for Europe's competitiveness in the globalised economy. The Presidency attaches great importance to achieve an agreement on the Single Market package ⁽²⁵⁾.

⁽²²⁾ Protocol between the European Union, the European Community, the Swiss Confederation and the Principality of Liechtenstein on the accession of the Principality of Liechtenstein to the agreement between the European Union, the European Community and the Swiss Confederation on the Swiss Confederation's association with the implementation, application and development of the Schengen acquis, 16462/06

⁽²³⁾ 6076/1/10

⁽²⁴⁾ See doc. 17574/1/10

⁽²⁵⁾ See doc. 17799/10

Particular attention will be paid to enhancing the labour market integration of young people in the framework of the two flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy, namely 'Youth on the Move' and 'Agenda for New Skills and Jobs', which aim to improve the employment of young workers and to make easier the transition from education to employment. The work of the Hungarian Presidency in this area will be closely linked to the joint Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Programme ⁽²⁶⁾ since youth employment is a topic of common interest for the Trio.

Furthermore, on the basis of the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs ⁽²⁷⁾, the Hungarian Presidency intends to address the possibilities for stronger policies to facilitate an employment friendly recovery and address the issue of regional employment inequalities.

The Hungarian Presidency will invite Ministers to engage in a joint reflection on these issues during the informal meeting of Employment Ministers which will take place on 16-18 January 2011 in Gödöllő.

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Question no 11 by Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (H-000001/11)

Subject: Presidential elections in Belarus

The presidential elections in Belarus on 19 December ended without big surprises, with the current President, Alexander Lukashenko, being re-elected for a fourth term with almost 80% of the vote. Moreover, more than 600 opposition activists were arrested during their protests against the undemocratic nature of the elections, including seven presidential candidates themselves. During the crackdown on opposition activists, Alexander Lukashenko stated that there would be no more 'senseless democracy' in Belarus.

Can the Council provide its assessment of these presidential elections in Belarus? How do they compare with the previous elections we had seen? What impact will the conduct of these elections have on EU-Belarus relations? Do we have a strategy for our engagement with Belarus?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) Belarus still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments on holding elections. The EU recognises the serious problems with the electoral process and the vote count as reported by the OSCE election observation mission and urged the government of Belarus to meet its OSCE commitments to substantially reform the electoral process. The EU regrets the government of Belarus' decision to terminate the mission of the OSCE's office in Minsk.

The OSCE has carried out valuable work in the country, in particular, in promoting institution building and the rule of law and supporting the development of civil society. The EU sees this process in great danger.

⁽²⁶⁾ See doc. 16771/09

⁽²⁷⁾ See doc. 17066/10

The EU strongly condemns all acts of violence and repression, especially the use of force against presidential candidates, political activists, representatives of civil society, journalists and demonstrators. The beating and detention of several opposition leaders, including presidential candidates, is unacceptable. Taken together, the elections and their aftermath represent a substantial step backwards in the development of democratic governance and respect for human rights in Belarus. The EU called for the immediate release of the presidential candidates and the more than 600 demonstrators who have been imprisoned in the wake of the presidential elections in Belarus.

Respect for democracy and human rights remain central to improving Belarus's relations with the EU. Without substantial progress in these areas, relations cannot improve. It is against this background that the EU will be assessing the government of Belarus's actions to address the current situation and to take developments into account as it reviews relations with Belarus. The EU intends to strengthen its support for and engagement with the people of Belarus and civil society representatives.

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Question no 12 by Charalampos Angourakis (H-000006/11)

Subject: New provocative action by Israel against the Palestinian people

Israel's army and air force have recently escalated their murderous attacks in the Gaza strip, increasing the number of dead and wounded among the Palestinian civilian population, which is suffering from the occupation and from the economic blockade imposed by Israel which even prevents fishermen from putting to sea. The efforts to terrorise the Palestinian people continued unabated throughout the Christmas and New Year period, mainly around the area of the green line and the wall that Israel has built, and there were also bombing raids inside Gaza. At the same time, we condemn the illegal imprisonment of thousands of political prisoners, including women and children, who have been held for many years in unacceptable conditions in Israeli prisons.

Does the Council intend to condemn this new provocation by Israel against the Palestinian people and to recognise the existence of an independent, unified and sovereign Palestinian state in the territories occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital? Does it intend to call for the immediate release of Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli prisons?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) The Council has consistently been calling for a two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where Jerusalem would become a capital of two states. As recently as in December 2010, the Foreign Affairs Council reiterated in its conclusions that 'urgent progress is needed towards a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We want to see the State of Israel and a sovereign, independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security' and that 'a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states'.

The issue of Palestinian detainees and prisoners has featured prominently in bilateral contacts between the EU and Israel, for example, within the Informal Working Group on

Human Rights, which had its latest meeting in September 2010 and in which the Council actively participates. Specific cases of detention, especially where the detainees could be considered human rights defenders under the EU guidelines, have been dealt with in this working group. Some were also given high visibility by means of statements issued by the office of High Representative, Catherine Ashton. (For example, the statement of the HR spokesperson on Mr Abdullah Abu Rahma of 24 August 2010).

The Israeli policy of blockade against the Gaza Strip has been subject to the Council's criticism, which described it as 'unacceptable and politically counterproductive' (Council conclusions of December 2009, referred to in the December 2010 conclusions). While partial steps by the Israeli Government towards alleviating the policy of closure (most recently on 8 December 2010) are steps in the right direction, more remains to be done.

As regards alleged Israeli actions against civilians, the honourable Member knows that persecution of civilian population by state power, whether directed against a state's own citizens or otherwise, is contrary to the rule of law and democratic principles in general. By extension, such acts are irreconcilable with basic values of the European Union, notably right to life in safety in security. It is imperative that allegations of such acts be subjected to thorough investigation and, if confirmed, to strong criticism.

Various incidents between Israeli security services and Palestinians as well as in regard to Israeli policies under the occupation regime, the Council has always insisted on respecting international law and including international humanitarian law by both sides. These are principles that the Foreign Affairs Council referred to in its conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process in December 2009 and reiterated as recently as December 2010.

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Question no 13 by Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (H-000008/11)

Subject: Problem of compensation for environmental damage

Last year, Hungary, which has recently taken over the Presidency of the Council, was hit by a major environmental disaster, the red sludge flood. One of the main causes of the disaster was said to be poor maintenance of the facility concerned. The EU does not provide financial assistance to Member States in the event of disasters caused by deliberate human agency or by negligence. If those responsible are short of funds, Member States themselves are often unable to bear the financial consequences of such an accident unassisted.

Does not the Presidency consider that the legal provisions on the planning (particularly in connection with environmental impact assessments), maintenance and operation of installations which pose serious environmental risks should be reviewed and made more stringent? Would it not be desirable to establish a fund in the European Union financed by means of contributions from those with control over installations which pose serious environmental risks, on which it would subsequently be possible to draw to provide compensation for damage caused by environmental disasters attributable to such facilities (similar to the fund voluntarily established by British Petroleum to pay compensation for the consequences of the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico)?

Answer

The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the January 2011 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

(EN) An important body of EU legislation, that should help prevent accidents such as the one which occurred in Hungary, is already in place, in particular, legislation on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control ⁽²⁸⁾ and on Management of Waste from Extractive Industries ⁽²⁹⁾. As regards natural disasters, industrial accidents fall under the Environmental Liability Directive ⁽³⁰⁾ which implements the 'polluter pays' principle.

The full assessment of the applicability of the existing legislation requires the completion of the analysis of the accident in Kolontár by the Hungarian authorities and the Commission. Once this process is concluded, it will be possible to evaluate whether any further action regarding EU environmental legislation should be considered. Any conclusions from the Commission in this respect will be examined by the Council without delay.

Concerning the suggestion of the honourable Member to establish a fund to provide compensation for damage caused by deliberate acts or negligence, and financed by operators of installations entailing environmental risks, it has to be noted that it is up to the Commission to consider the possible options in light of the present accident, including the option to enable liable operators to bear the full costs of major accidents.

As far as the Solidarity Fund of the European Union is concerned, the Commission suggested in 2006 to review Council Regulation No 2012/2002 ⁽³¹⁾. Nevertheless, the Council, in view of the Special Report of the Court of Auditors on the functioning of the Fund ⁽³²⁾, concluded in 2008 that in general, the management of the Fund is efficient, but considered that there is room and need for improvement in the speed of management, and stressed that the Council sees no need at this stage for a revision of Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 ⁽³³⁾.

⁽²⁸⁾ Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (Recast) (Text with EEA relevance) (OJ L 334, 17.12.2010, p. 17)

⁽²⁹⁾ Directive 2006/21/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 on the management of waste from extractive industries and amending Directive 2004/35/EC (OJ L 102, 11.4.2006, p. 15)

⁽³⁰⁾ Directive 2004/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 on environmental liability with regard to the prevention and remedying of environmental damage (OJ L 143, 30.4.2004, p. 56)

⁽³¹⁾ Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund (OJ L 311, 14.11.2002, p. 3)

⁽³²⁾ Court of Auditors, Special Report No 3/2008 'The European Union Solidarity Fund: how rapid, efficient and flexible is it?' (OJ C 153, 18.6.2008, p. 1)

⁽³³⁾ Council Conclusions concerning the Court of Auditors' Special Report No 3/2008 on the European Union Solidarity Fund, 11194/08

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QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSION

Question no 21 by Brian Crowley (H-0655/10)

Subject: The roll-out of high-speed broadband

Can the Commission make a detailed statement outlining the specific actions it will undertake to support the roll-out of high-speed broadband technology across all EU Member States, including Ireland?

Answer

(EN) The Commission strongly supports the roll-out of high speed broadband across Europe and has undertaken a number of actions to achieve this goal.

The investment needed for broadband infrastructure will largely come from the private sector. In addition, the Commission encourages Member States to support the roll-out of broadband networks with public and EU funds where the business case for private investment is weak.

Just in 2010, the Commission has assessed and approved the use of almost EUR 1.8 billion of State aid for broadband development in the European Union capable of generating EUR 3-3.5 billion of investment in this sector ⁽³⁴⁾.

Concerning Ireland, the Commission has so far assessed and approved 3 State aid broadband measures in the country and authorised the use of more than EUR 250 million in this sector ⁽³⁵⁾, as well as the joint Project Kelvin ⁽³⁶⁾ of Ireland and Northern Ireland, aiming to bring a direct international link through a submarine cable to the North West of Ireland.

Moreover, the Commission is working closely with the European Investment Bank to identify innovative financing solutions for the next Multiannual Financial Framework that could broaden the investment horizon to include, through credit and maturity enhancement, higher risk profile projects in less populated geographic areas.

In 2011, the Commission will also issue guidance for local and regional authorities on the use of EU funds for broadband project design and preparation and will adopt investment guidelines on broadband for local and regional authorities to facilitate full absorption of EU funds. In addition, by 2013, the Commission will reinforce and rationalise the use of funding of high-speed broadband through EU instruments under the current financial framework (e.g. ERDF, ERDP, EAFRD, TEN, CIP).

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⁽³⁴⁾ The Commission regularly publishes the list of State aid broadband decisions here:

http://ec.europa.eu/competition/sectors/telecommunications/broadband_decisions.pdf

⁽³⁵⁾ Commission decisions in cases N284/2005 - Metropolitan Area Network Broadband Programme of Ireland of 8/3/2006, N475/2007 National Broadband Scheme Ireland of 25/9/2007 and N607/2009 Rural Broadband Scheme of 4/12/2009

⁽³⁶⁾ Commission decisions in cases N282/2008 Project Kelvin and N248/2008 Projekt Kelvin of 8/10/2008

Question no 24 by Silvia-Adriana Țicău (H-0626/10)**Subject: Improvement and extension of the NAIADES Programme**

In view of the forthcoming mid-term evaluation of the NAIADES Programme, and bearing in mind that not all Member States with inland waterways have managed to access that programme, can the Commission state how it plans to increase the accessibility of the NAIADES Programme in the period 2011-2013, to improve it and to extend it after 2013?

Answer

(EN) For the last 5 years, the NAIADES Action Programme inspired the Commission's inland shipping policy and will continue to do so for another 3 years. NAIADES addresses, in the first place, a series of legislative, policy and coordination measures, originating from current policies and the existing regulatory framework, and aiming at enhanced framework conditions for the sector and its consolidation. We can already see an increase in the share of inland waterway in the overall transport.

It is obvious that such a programme cannot be pursued at EU level alone, but requires also the commitment of Member States and the inland navigation sector as well as an appropriate implementation at national level.

NAIADES was meant as a medium to long-term policy programme that aims at making better use of relevant funding programmes such as TEN-T and Marco Polo. However, NAIADES is not a financial support programme with its own financial resources.

The second progress report on NAIADES summarising the main achievements in the five priority areas up to now will be published in the first half of 2011. As regards the remaining period 2011-2013, the Commission intends to continue with the implementation of NAIADES along already defined lines.

But the Commission also needs to ensure the long-term development and successful implementation of a European inland waterway transport policy beyond 2013. Therefore, it intends to bring forward a proposal for a continuation programme in due time, embedded in the wider strategic policy framework as defined by the forthcoming White Paper and developing further successful activities and reflecting on possible 'lessons learnt' where necessary.

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Question no 25 by Marc Tarabella (H-0633/10)**Subject: Airlines' non-compliance with Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 with regard to protection and information for passengers**

Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 came into force as long ago as 2005, with the key aim of ensuring that airline passengers were protected and properly informed. The Commission has run its own awareness-raising campaigns on the subject, yet airlines repeatedly violate the regulation, leaving passengers without swift and effective remedies. Meanwhile, online booking has turned into a racket: a ticket from Brussels to Strasbourg with an ordinary carrier, advertised and heavily promoted at the price of EUR 98, ends up costing a total of EUR 219.60, including something called a 'fuel fee'!

Can the Commission indicate when and how it intends to ensure that the Member States apply Regulation (EC) No 261/2004 and to require them to introduce arrangements for rapid and effective compensation?

Answer

(EN) First, let the Commission remind that the correct application of Regulation No 261/2004 on air passengers' rights must be ensured by the designated National Enforcement Bodies. These National Enforcement Bodies (NEBs) have to take all reasonable measures to ensure that the rights of passengers are fully respected. The Commission constantly monitors their activity to ensure that EU law is correctly implemented and enforced by the Member States.

The Commission can assure the honourable Member that it is ready to intervene if there is a pattern of cases which shows that a Member State is failing to enforce the regulation. The Commission has been working in close cooperation with NEBs to improve the application of the regulation, notably through common interpretation, exchange of information on enforcement, exchange of best practices and further harmonisation of working tools as statistics on sanctions and complaints. In 2010, the Commission has encouraged several joint NEB actions against carriers, which greatly contributed to ensuring the successful harmonised correction of any improper practice.

Second, the Commission would like to recall that means of redress are available to passengers. The National authorities are also in charge of handling complaints from passengers and to issue a motivated opinion, albeit not binding, on the circumstances of the passenger's individual case. Furthermore, air passengers always retain the right to seek redress via a court procedure. In this context, they may benefit from the European procedure of settlement of small disputes: a simplified, accelerated and cheaper court procedure for small cross-border disputes. They should also be able to benefit from the work of the Commission in the area of collective redress. Further initiatives of the Commission in the field of consumer protection will also help passengers. For instance, the future legislative proposal on ADR – Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms under the responsibility of the Commissioner in charge of Health and Consumer Policy, foreseen in the Commission Work Programme for the end of 2011, will improve the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms as an easy, low cost and quick way of resolving disputes out of court.

Finally, the honourable Member raises the issue of the price indications given during the booking process. Regulation No 1008/2008 on common rules for the operation of air services in the Community provides for price transparency rules: the final price to be paid shall, at all times, be indicated, including in advertisements; it shall include the applicable air fare as well as applicable taxes, charges, surcharges and fees which are unavoidable and foreseeable at the time of publication. This also includes the so-called fuel surcharge that you mention. The Commission is monitoring this important question very closely, in close cooperation with the national authorities in charge of enforcement in the Member States. In 2011, the Commission will undertake a deeper review on the matter.

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Question no 26 by Ismail Ertug (H-0643/10)**Subject: EU-supported study to conduct variant-independent research into upgrading works on the Danube between Straubing and Vilshofen**

I would like to ask the Commission once again two questions out of five that have already been put to it in writing (P-9178/2010), but that the Directorate-General for Transport totally ignored.

Is the Commission of the opinion that the Vilshofen-Straubing monitoring group cannot fulfil the critical and constructive role intended for it by the EU in ensuring proper implementation of the study and ensuring transparency and consensus because this study was drawn up by Rhein-Main-Donau AG, which has itself an economic interest in these upgrading works?

Is the Commission aware that the German Transport Minister, Mr Ramsauer (CSU), has publicly advocated upgrading on the basis of variant C 280, although Article III.2.6. of the grant notification requires the Federal Republic of Germany to ensure that the research is conducted impartially and objectively? The Commissioner responsible is requested not to ignore this question again. This study, at a cost of EUR 33 million, risks becoming the 'Stuttgart 21' of Lower Bavaria.

Answer

(EN) The EU-supported study to conduct variant-independent research into upgrading works on the Danube between Straubing and Vilshofen is of particular importance in the effort to identify a generally acceptable way out of this long deadlock. A deadlock that prevents inland waterways transport – in this part of the transcontinental connection – from fulfilling its potential as a particularly sustainable mode of transport, in both environmental and economic terms.

Developing inland waterways transport in a sound and sustainable manner helps lower the pressure on road transport – emissions, noise, congestion – and, in this specific case, also contributes to a better linking of regions, economies and people along one of the main natural connections of our continent (East-West, North-South).

It should be stressed in passing that economic development without proper care for environmental realities also poses undue economic risks, whilst fundamental blindness to sustainable and balanced solutions may entail serious environmental risks, such as from modal backshift, among other things.

On the Bavarian stretch of the Danube, between these two cities, the depth of the river is not sufficient for a reliable and economically viable navigation throughout the year. For two decades, inland waterway operators and environmental organisations have been debating on how to improve the navigability of the Danube.

Environmental organisations would favour the so-called 'Variant A' in order to preserve the last free-flowing section of the middle section of the Danube River, through the consolidation of the river banks for flood protection.

Transport operators object that this is the only section, from the Dutch border on the Rhine to the Austrian border on the Danube, where inland waterways transport cannot be ensured throughout the year as required. Transport operators therefore supported the so-called

Variant C-280 that would ensure a draught of 2.80 metres throughout the year, but requiring the construction of a lock.

In order to overcome this stalemate, the German Government launched, together with the Land of Bavaria, a three-year study to explore possible alternative solutions to these two opposing Variants. At the suggestion of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) Coordinator, Mrs K Peijs, a Monitoring Group to accompany the study was set up in January 2010 with the agreement of both parties: it is composed of nine prominent persons, four from the environmental side and four from the operator's side, chaired by an independent Professor, Hans-Joachim Koch, from the University of Hamburg.

The Group has met several times since its formation in March 2010 and work progresses. It is expected that the study will produce valuable and fully transparent results in 2012, supporting the regional and national authorities in developing economically and environmentally sustainable inland waterways transport on the Danube.

Recent newspaper articles in the Bavarian/German press alleged that the implication of the Rhein-Main-Donau (RMD) company was impairing the transparency and the neutrality of the study. The Commission has been informed by the Monitoring Group Chairman that he has no reason to believe that the study is not performed correctly.

The subject of the study is to find an acceptable solution independent from the previous assessment and, by its very nature, will have to be in the interests of all parties concerned, including RMD.

The Commission is also aware of statements made by the German Transport Minister, Mr Ramsauer, as have other concerned parties in the matter. In the Commission's view, such statements do not impair the proper results of the study but contribute to useful transparency in the discussion.

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Question no 27 by Gay Mitchell (H-0645/10)

Subject: Volcano in Iceland

Last April, European Airspace was shut down by the eruption of a volcano in Iceland. According to experts, there may be another such eruption, which will prove to be as disruptive as the last one.

What measures has the Commission taken to prepare for such an incident, if it happens again?

Answer

(EN) The Commission, along with other regulatory authorities and industry stakeholders, has been actively engaged in ensuring an improved level of preparedness for a volcanic eruption, and consequently, Europe is better prepared as demonstrated through agreed concentration levels to allow for flight in ash contaminated airspace, enhanced advisory material produced by the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centres, improved operational procedures and the establishment of the European Aviation Crisis Coordination Cell (EACCC) to facilitate a harmonised approach by Member States. Consequently, we should be able to minimise the potential disruption in case of future events of this kind.

The Commission will continue the work on all actions proposed in its information note of 27 April 2010 and endorsed by the extraordinary Transport Council of 4 May 2010, as well as other activities where European contribution is deemed necessary, notably the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)'s International Volcanic Ash Task Force.

In particular, we need to build greater resilience into our transport system to preserve the mobility of passengers and goods in case of disruptive events. At the last Transport Council in December 2010, Commissioner Kallas, responsible for Transport, invited Ministers to reflect specifically on this aspect.

The Commission will regularly report to the Transport Council and will keep the Parliament informed of developments.

Additional detail on actions undertaken:

- a new European approach has been developed together with the European Aviation Safety Agency. This approach ensures close cooperation between airlines, manufacturers and authorities;
- a revised Volcanic Ash Contingency Plan has been published by the ICAO, supplemented by guidance for safety risk assessment for flight operations in known or forecast volcanic ash contamination;
- the European Aviation Crisis Coordination Cell has been established, through which improved coordination and application of mitigating measures will be facilitated;
- the Volcanic Ash Advisory Centre has improved its products to accommodate a greater level of granularity and frequency in its publications, which, in turn, will enhance operational decision-making processes;
- a new tool has been developed by Eurocontrol called the European Crisis Visualisation Interactive Tool for Air Traffic Flow & Capacity Management, or EVITA. It will facilitate information sharing and decision making between Member States and other key players.

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Question no 28 by Luis de Grandes Pascual (H-0649/10)

Subject: Control of European airspace

Only a few weeks ago, the serious incidents caused by the Spanish air traffic controllers with the closure of Spanish airspace caused enormous prejudice to citizens, companies and the whole of the Spanish economy. In April this year, European airspace also suffered major disturbance because of the volcanic eruption in Iceland.

With regard to situations of this kind, and without prejudice to the measures taken at national level, does the Commission intend to increase response capacity at European level by, for example, strengthening the powers of Eurocontrol, encouraging mobility amongst air traffic controllers, setting up European support teams or developing new technology in the field of air navigation?

Answer

(EN) The modernisation of the European Air Traffic Management (ATM) system has been an objective of the Commission in the last years. A second package of measures related to

the 'Single European Sky' was adopted by the EU in November 2009, which is about performance in the fields of safety, capacity, cost-efficiency and environment. Recent events such as the volcanic ash cloud crisis of April-May 2010 and the actions by the Spanish air traffic controllers on 3-4 December 2010 have confirmed the necessity to accelerate its implementation process.

The Commission has therefore prepared a number of actions that have already been taken or are being prepared with the objective to increase the capacity of the European Air Traffic Management system, such as:

- the setting up of a Crisis Coordination Cell immediately after the volcanic ash cloud crisis to coordinate better national mitigation measures in case of crisis at European level;
- arrangements related to mobility amongst air traffic controllers;
- the nomination of Eurocontrol as Network Manager for the ATM functions in spring 2011, strengthening its capability to act as the technical arm of the Single European Sky;
- the improvement of the air navigation services performance as of January 2012 with significant reduction of charges to be paid by the aviation industry;
- the implementation of the Functional Airspace Blocks by December 2012 which will contribute to the defragmentation of the European airspace;
- the continuation of the SESAR programme and the deployment of the related technologies.

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Question no 29 by Ivo Belet (H-0650/10)

Subject: Radiation from airport scanners

Concerns have been raised in the USA about potential risks to air passengers from exposure to the x-rays from full-body security scanners. A poorly functioning scanner could expose passengers to high levels of radiation. Regular maintenance of the x-ray devices is therefore essential.

Does the Commission supervise the installation and operation of full-body scanners at airports in the EU?

Can the Commission provide a list of the airports where such scanners are already (end of 2010) in operation?

Can the Commission state what measures are currently in force to monitor the maintenance of scanners so as to protect passengers from potential health risks when undergoing security checks at airports?

Is the Commission considering the possibility of an initiative in this connection?

Answer

(EN) Today, there is no EU legislation on the regular use of security scanners at EU airports. Member States can only use security scanners as a trial for a limited period of time, as a more stringent measure or as a demonstration. Therefore, the use of scanners does not currently fall under the Commission's inspection programme.

In the context of the preparation of the impact assessment on the use of security scanners in the autumn of 2010, the Commission has been informed that security scanners based on different technologies are or have been used at the following EU airports: Amsterdam Schiphol, London Heathrow, Manchester, Helsinki, Hamburg and Paris Charles de Gaulle. On the basis of this information, X-ray security scanners are currently in use in London Heathrow and Manchester. The Commission is also aware that demonstrations of security scanners took place in Rome Fiumicino, Venice, Milan Malpensa, Palermo and Copenhagen airports. However, the Commission has not received any official confirmation from the appropriate Italian and Danish authorities.

To date, the Commission does not have an up-to-date overview of precise national rules that apply to maintenance controls to protect passengers from health risks at security screening check points. However, conditions for health protection enshrined in EU and EURATOM legislation apply.

In particular, as regards the use of X-ray equipment, security scanners like any other equipment using ionising radiation, need to respect the legal provisions set for their use. Indeed, the risk of long-term health effects from exposure to ionising radiation, albeit very small at low doses, is well known. For this reason, all equipment shall respect the provisions of Directive 96/29/Euratom⁽³⁷⁾, including the application of the following main principles, namely:

justification of the equipment's use before being first put in operation regarding its economic, social or other benefits in relation to the health detriment it may cause;

optimisation of protection to ensure that the radiation doses from the practice are kept as low as reasonably achievable, economic and social factors being taken into account;

limitation of the exposure to ensure that the sum of the doses from all relevant practices will not exceed the legal dose limits for workers or the general public.

Ensuring compliance with the above provisions falls under the responsibility of the national authorities.

The deliberate exposure of people to ionising radiation for non-medical reasons, including for security purposes, is given specific consideration⁽³⁸⁾ in the ongoing recast of Directive 96/29/Euratom with other Directives, in particular, Directive 97/43/Euratom⁽³⁹⁾ on medical exposure.

The Commission is currently assessing the possible impact of security scanners at EU airports in terms of detection performance, fundamental rights and health.

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⁽³⁷⁾ Council Directive 96/29/Euratom of 13 May 1996 laying down basic safety standards for the protection of the health of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionising radiation, OJ L 159, 29.6.1996

⁽³⁸⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/energy/nuclear/radiation_protection/doc/art31/2010_02_24_opinion_on_bss.pdf

⁽³⁹⁾ Council Directive 97/43/Euratom of 30 June 1997 on health protection of individuals against the dangers of ionising radiation in relation to medical exposure, and repealing Directive 84/466/Euratom, OJ L 180, 9.7.1997

Question no 30 by Pat the Cope Gallagher (H-000003/11)**Subject: Transport disruption across Europe**

Can the Commission outline what initiatives it will undertake to improve the functioning of Europe's transport infrastructure following the recent disruption to air travel due to severe snow?

Answer

(EN) Air travel and, to a lesser extent, land transport in December 2010 was heavily disrupted throughout Europe. Many of our larger hubs partially closed during one of the busiest weekends of the year: the beginning of the Christmas holidays. Overall, thousands of flights were cancelled and tens of thousands of people were stranded at airports, not to speak about major luggage handling problems. It is the Commission's duty to minimise the impact of these extreme weather conditions if these were to happen again. The Commission is, however, very pleased that no accident occurred and that safety was ensured.

Concerning the improvement of the overall transport network in case of crisis, the Commission also plans to use the existing work that has been carried out in the aftermath of the ash cloud crisis of April 2010: the Commission has been reflecting upon ways to ensure operators or Member States have mobility plans for passengers and goods to be applied in case of a sudden transport crisis. In this context, the Commission submitted a list of questions to Member States during the last Transport Council of 2 December 2010.

First, we have to learn from what happened. As Commissioner Kallas, responsible for Transport, announced in December 2010, he will meet on 19 January 2011 with airport representatives to discuss precisely what happened and what could be done to avoid similar situations in the future. The Commission is, of course, open to discuss any solutions that would avoid a repetition of the events in December 2010.

The Commission's services will also work together with Member States' authorities and take this opportunity to welcome those Member States that offered to share their findings with the Commission and that supported action at EU level if necessary.

Based on these discussions, the Commissioner in charge of Transport will see if there is a need for the Commission to propose new measures. If so, he will not hesitate to take action. The Airport package that he will present later in 2011 will be very important.

The Commission intends to build on other planned initiatives. The upcoming revision of the Air Passenger Rights Regulation could be an opportunity to improve the communication with passengers as well as the re-routing of stranded passengers, for instance, by temporarily suspending night curfew restrictions.

The Commission is committed to work hard to improve the European air travel system to ensure that European citizens will not have to go through a similar experience again.

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Question no 31 by Licia Ronzulli (H-0627/10)**Subject: 2010-2015 gender equality strategy**

On 21 September 2010, the Commission unveiled the gender equality strategy for the years 2010 to 2015. According to the opinion on 'The Future of Gender Equality Policy

after 2015', the fact that there are no specific headings, either in the EU budget or in national budgets, for gender equality activities is making the strategy's aims considerably more difficult to achieve. What does the Commission think should be done?

In most Member States, women are still underrepresented in decision-making processes and positions. What steps will the Commission take to enable more women to rise to decision-making positions? Are any initiatives currently being considered with a view to championing the cause of gender equality in the eyes of the younger generation? Does the Commission believe that funding should be proposed for specific actions to that end, to be implemented under European training programmes, for example, or with the aid of new technology applications?

Answer

(FR) The Commission's new strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015)⁽⁴⁰⁾ identifies five priority areas as well as cross-cutting actions. A document annexed to the Strategy⁽⁴¹⁾ sets out the actions that the various Commission departments will be implementing in the years to come, in particular, the main funding programmes aimed at promoting equality between women and men.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is the Union's main financial instrument in the field of training and employment promotion. It finances many areas of action in order to promote equality between women and men in the labour market. Furthermore, the Commission indicated in its Communication on the budget review⁽⁴²⁾, and in the conclusions of the fifth report on 'economic, social and territorial cohesion: the future of cohesion policy'⁽⁴³⁾, that it is necessary to examine how the Union could achieve more predictable ESF funding volumes. Such a development could help raise the profile of European funds allocated to promoting equality between women and men.

Equality in decision making is one of the five priority areas for action in the Commission's new Strategy. The actions, which will be implemented in this area by the various Commission departments, are also set out in a document annexed to the Strategy.

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Question no 32 by Seán Kelly (H-0628/10)

Subject: Closure of sugar beet plant in Mallow, Co. Cork, Ireland

Following the publication of the European Court of Auditors' report into the reform of the EU sugar sector in 2005-2006, which highlighted the fact that decisions were taken with regard to the sector in Ireland based on figures published in 2001 that did not reflect a restructuring of the sector in between, has the Commission any plans to address the situation, especially with regard to the possibility of aiding the re-establishment of the sugar sector in Ireland for, amongst other things, the production of biofuels, which could contribute to reaching 2020 targets?

⁽⁴⁰⁾ COM(2010) 491 final

⁽⁴¹⁾ SEC(2010) 1079 final

⁽⁴²⁾ COM(2010) 700 final

⁽⁴³⁾ COM(2010) 642 final

Answer

(FR) The Commission is aware that the loss of a traditional industry such as the sugar industry in Ireland is painful.

The decision to give up the Irish sugar quota was not taken by the Commission on the basis of the data available at the time of the reform, but by the management of the Irish sugar factory, who are undoubtedly best placed to assess the future competitiveness of the factory's production in the internal sugar market, in the conditions in force post-reform.

However, abandoning the entire Irish sugar production quota has no bearing on the possibility of producing biofuels from sugar beet in Ireland.

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Question no 33 by Angelika Niebler (H-0631/10)**Subject: Award of EU subsidies to Chinese state-owned construction companies**

In Poland, a stretch of the A2 motorway between Warsaw and Łódź totalling 50 km in length is currently under construction, with financing from European subsidies (EU Structural Funds) and an EIB loan. The contract to construct this stretch of motorway was awarded by the Polish General Directorate for National Roads and Highways to a consortium of Chinese state-owned construction companies under the name COVEC.

In competing with European construction firms, the Chinese tenderer's bids were less than half the cost estimated for the project by the competent authority and undercut their nearest competitor by one third. In contrast, the Chinese market is closed to virtually all foreign competition in the construction industry.

In the light of this situation, does the Commission consider that the international principle of reciprocity that forms a key negotiating basis for international trade relations is being infringed on a huge scale in the EU's relationship with China? What action does the Commission intend to take in order to counter this trend?

Joint answer

(EN) The Commission understands the concerns of the honourable Members. Similar preoccupations have been expressed by other Members of Parliament, Member States and European industry.

The EU advocates an ambitious approach to the opening up of the global procurement markets. For this reason, the EU is a party to the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA), which opens up the public procurements markets of the world's most developed nations. In addition, the EU has concluded free trade agreements with a procurement chapter with a number of trading partners (including, for example, Chile, Mexico, Korea and Switzerland), which open the procurement markets of these partners on a reciprocal basis.

However, the EU has no international commitments vis-à-vis China in the area of public procurement. As a consequence, China and its suppliers do not have the right to be treated equally to the EU's GPA partners.

Since China is currently negotiating accession to the GPA, this situation could change in the coming years. In the context of the accession process, the EU requests China to commit

to setting ambitious market access goals. In parallel with these negotiations, the Commission is conducting an intensive dialogue with China aiming at the improvement of the Chinese regulatory procurement framework to render it GPA compliant.

Furthermore, the Commission has announced in its Communications ‘Towards a Single Market Act’⁽⁴⁴⁾ and ‘Trade, Growth and World Affairs’⁽⁴⁵⁾ that it will present in 2011 a legislative proposal clarifying the international market access commitments of the EU in the field of public procurement. The objective of this proposal will be to restore equal competition on the internal market and ensure an increased leverage of the EU in international negotiations. It will also clarify the position of third countries (and their suppliers) which have not subscribed to any international commitments vis-à-vis the EU in this field and will be based on reciprocity. The Commission is currently conducting an impact assessment of the possible options.

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Question no 35 by João Ferreira (H-0632/10)

Subject: Coastal erosion

Coastal erosion is increasingly threatening large areas of the Portuguese coast, from north to south. Among its diverse causes are: rising average ocean surface levels; reduced coastal sedimentation; deterioration of natural structures from human activity; and various types of coastal development. The phenomenon is, by now, threatening the security of people and property in a number of regions, and has already led to serious accidents. Unless it is contained and reversed, it could provoke considerable future damage and could have major economic, social and environmental repercussions.

What measures have been implemented at EU level to tackle this problem of coastal erosion?

How will the Commission integrate coastal erosion into the Community approach to the prevention of disasters of natural and human origin? What initiatives are being developed?

What support instruments are available to the Member States most vulnerable to the effects of coastal erosion?

Answer

(EN) Coastal erosion seriously affects around 25% of the European coasts⁽⁴⁶⁾. The problem is likely to increase due to climate change impacts, such as sea level rise and more frequent and intense storm surges. Moreover, increasing coastal development may interfere with natural sediment processes or augment the assets and population at risk of coastal erosion or flooding. The pan-European study EUROSION⁽⁴⁷⁾ established the extent of the coastal erosion problem in Europe and provided guidance, case studies and policy concepts to address coastal erosion more effectively. In 2010, the CONSCIENCE⁽⁴⁸⁾ project elaborated the policy concepts further and recommended ways to implement them. Furthermore,

⁽⁴⁴⁾ COM(2010) 608 final/2

⁽⁴⁵⁾ COM(2010) 612 final

⁽⁴⁶⁾ EEA 2006, The changing faces of Europe's coastal areas

⁽⁴⁷⁾ www.eurion.org

⁽⁴⁸⁾ <http://www.conscience-eu.net/>

projects and studies confirm that the financial costs of coastal defence and adaptation measures are significant. Prevention and early adaptation to climate risk are shown to be cost-effective policy options⁽⁴⁹⁾. The Commission's 2009 White Paper on adaptation to climate change⁽⁵⁰⁾ addresses coastal risks, including coastal erosion and proposes action to increase the resilience of coastal and marine areas. Work is now underway to ensure that adaptation in coastal areas is included in the framework of the Integrated Maritime Policy.

The research confirms that a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed to address coastal erosion risk adequately. The basis for such an integrated approach is provided by the 2002 Parliament and Council Recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)⁽⁵¹⁾. Also, other existing EU instruments, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Directives⁽⁵²⁾ and the Floods Directive⁽⁵³⁾ are important to reduce coastal erosion risk. For the Mediterranean coastal zones, the EU ratified the ICZM Protocol to the Barcelona Convention⁽⁵⁴⁾ in September 2010. The Protocol includes specific stipulations on coastal erosion.

The Commission will take the problem of coastal risk into account in the impact assessment for a follow-up to the ICZM Recommendation, envisaged for the end of 2011. Given that spatial planning is identified as an important tool to reduce vulnerability in coastal areas, the impact assessment considers both coastal management and maritime spatial planning (MSP)⁽⁵⁵⁾. In the meantime, the Commission continues to support the exchange of experience and best practice in the implementation of ICZM through the OURCOAST initiative⁽⁵⁶⁾. The initiative will deliver an interactive database with at least 350 cases and guidance on specific topics and ICZM principles, including adaptation to risks and climate change.

In addition, the Commission is carrying out a number of measures in order to fully implement an EU framework for the prevention of disasters, as proposed by the Communication on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters adopted in February 2009⁽⁵⁷⁾ and enhanced by the Council⁽⁵⁸⁾. Within this framework, the Commission issued, on 21 December 2010⁽⁵⁹⁾, a guidance paper on national risk assessment and mapping for disaster management, which was developed together with the national authorities of the Member States. The 'Risk Assessment and Mapping Guidelines for Disaster Management' aim to enhance coherence and comparability between risks assessments developed at national level in the Member States. The non-binding guidelines, based on a

(49) JRC 2009, PESETA project; EC 2009, 'The economics of climate change adaptation in EU coastal areas': http://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/climate_change_en.html

(50) COM(2009) 147

(51) 2002/413/EC, OJ L 148, 6.6.2002

(52) 85/337/EEC; 2001/42/EC

(53) 2007/60/EC, OJ L 288, 6.11.2007

(54) 2010/631/EU, OJ L 279, 23.10.2010

(55) COM(2008) 791, COM(2010) 771

(56) <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/iczm/ourcoast.htm>

(57) COM(2009) 82

(58) 15394/09, 30 November 2009

(59) SEC(2010) 1626 final

multi-hazard and multi-risk approach, give orientation on matters of terminology, the involvement of different sectors and stakeholders, and the most useful methods and concepts.

Further to the White Paper on Adaptation to climate change, the Commission is also developing an Adaptation Clearinghouse, to be operational by early 2012, that will cover key policy sectors, including coastal areas. The aim of the clearinghouse is to enhance the uptake of knowledge by national, regional or local decision makers, by offering guidance, tools and best practices for assessments of vulnerability to climate change at different geographical levels. Building on the implementation of the White Paper, the Commission will, by 2013, develop a comprehensive EU Adaptation Strategy.

Regarding funding opportunities, the 2007-2013 Cohesion Policy will invest about EUR 5.8 billion in natural risk prevention. In accordance with the principle of 'shared management', it is up to the Member States to select and implement the co-funded projects based on the priorities set in the relevant Operational Programmes. In this framework, coastal protection activities might be supported. As regards Portugal, EUR 513 684 600 are planned to be invested in 'risk prevention' through its Operational Programmes of the 2007-13 Cohesion Policy. The Atlantic transnational programme supports ANCORIM (Atlantic network for coastal risk management)⁽⁶⁰⁾, which includes Portuguese partners.

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Question no 36 by Nikolaos Chountis (H-0637/10)

Subject: Increased fares on public transport

The Memorandum of Understanding between Greece, the EU and the IMF specifically refers to increased fares on public transport. According to press reports, the increase in fares will be between 30 and 50%.

Given that the Commission is supposed to encourage the use of public transport and that the financial burden caused by an increase in fare prices will have a significant economic impact on disadvantaged sections of the population, will it say:

Can it confirm such excessive increases in fares on public transport, particularly urban transport? Does it consider it necessary to add such a measure, which will mainly affect the disadvantaged sections of the population, to the huge increase in direct and indirect taxes?

Does it believe that this measure is consistent with EU policies which are supposed to encourage public transport as a cheaper and more environmentally friendly means of transport?

Answer

(EN) The autumn 2010 update of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is a publicly available document which can be found at:

http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/occasional_paper/2010/op72_en.htm"

⁽⁶⁰⁾ ANCORIM http://atlanticprojects.inescporto.pt/project-area/ancorim/project_view

According to the MoU, measures on public enterprises are taken with the aim of fighting waste and mismanagement in state-owned companies, reducing their costs and improving their financial performance. Transport services and networks have to be streamlined according to user demand.

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Question no 37 by Philip Claeys (H-0638/10)

Subject: Need for a firm attitude by the EU to third countries which prevent the return of deported asylum seekers and thus contribute to the Greek asylum crisis

The EU is battling with the problem of illegal foreign residents, but recently, a number of countries have decided to stop returning deported asylum seekers to Greece, in spite of the EU's Dublin Rule. A recent visit to Greece by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs revealed that one of the reasons is that the embassies of Algeria, Morocco, Turkey, Tunisia and Pakistan are refusing to issue repatriation documents within a reasonable time, which means that the number of illegals in Greece continues to rise.

What is the EU doing to require these third countries to guard their borders with the EU adequately, and will it in future link aid to, and cooperation with, these countries to border policing and policy on repatriation? Is the Commission prepared to take Turkish border policing and the speedy conclusion of an agreement with Frontex into account in its evaluation of International Project Aid to Turkey?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is very much aware of the difficult situation Member States are confronted with in tackling irregular migration.

The Commission is concerned especially by the situation in Greece at its land border with Turkey where currently, 90% of detected irregular crossings of migrants along the EU's external borders take place.

It should be underlined that the responsibility for controlling the external borders in accordance with the requirements set out by European law, notably, the Schengen Border Code, lies entirely with the Member States. Greece, like any other Member State, therefore has to do its utmost in order to meet those requirements.

However, the European Union should demonstrate solidarity and assist the Member States in its efforts to bring irregular migration under control.

With this objective, the EU is promoting a number of initiatives such as the joint operations and supporting concrete projects through the allocation of financial resources under the relevant Funds (External Borders Fund, European Refugee Fund and Return Fund).

Greece has been the main 'beneficiary' of FRONTEX operational activities in 2010, hosting joint operations at its land and maritime borders in order to increase the efficiency of border management (including surveillance, checks and identification of irregular immigrants with a view to their return with due respect for any potential need for protection). Due to the exceptional pressure of irregular immigration at its external borders, Greece requested on 24 October 2010 the assistance of Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs) and a decision to deploy these teams was taken shortly after. The deployment of RABITs has already had a deterrent effect and it is estimated that there has been an overall

decrease of 43% in the number of irregular migrants intercepted at the Greek-Turkish land border.

In tackling irregular migration, it is of vital importance to work with countries of origin and transit. Therefore, the Commission encourages Member States and FRONTEX to develop practical cooperation with those countries.

Concretely, this could involve initiatives such as the exchange of information on the modus operandi of irregular migrants and facilitators, the development of common risk analyses with regard to movements of irregular migrants, the appointment of contact points in FRONTEX and in the third countries' authorities for the purpose of a continuous, operational exchange of information and cooperation with regard to returning irregular immigrants.

In addition, the Commission is also actively developing direct dialogue and cooperation with all the countries of origin and transit of migration, in order to persuade them to increase their efforts to prevent and combat irregular migration and to readmit the irregular migrants having transited through their territory.

With reference to the countries mentioned by the honourable Member, in particular, the Commission is taking concrete initiatives with all of them. The Commission is negotiating a readmission agreement with Morocco, is making serious efforts to start negotiations on a readmission agreement with Algeria, has proposed that Tunisia accepts the inclusion of provisions related to cooperation on the readmission of irregular migrants into the new EU-Tunisia Action Plan, and the readmission agreement with Pakistan, which the Commission successfully negotiated with this country on behalf of the European Union, entered into force on 1 December 2010.

Within this context, particular attention is paid to Turkey, a country through which a large amount of irregular migrants and asylum seekers transit towards the European Union coming from origin countries in Africa and Asia.

As a candidate for accession to the European Union, Turkey is expected to make particular efforts to enhance its policies and legislation in the areas of border, migration and asylum management, as well as the administrative capacities of its relevant authorities, in line with the European Union standards. The Commission closely monitors the progress made by Turkey in developing its capacities, and is providing important financial and technical assistance in this endeavour. Meanwhile, the Commission continues to negotiate a readmission agreement with Turkey on behalf of the European Union, while FRONTEX is negotiating a working arrangement with Turkish authorities.

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Question no 38 by Mairead McGuinness (H-0642/10)

Subject: EU-Mercosur negotiations

The conclusion of a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Mercosur trading bloc has the potential seriously to undermine agricultural production in the EU. Can the Commission indicate what beef import quota they anticipate from Mercosur in negotiations?

In 2006, Mercosur submitted a paper which included a request for a tariff quota of 300 000 tonnes of beef. ⁽⁶¹⁾ The Commission, in its response, described this request as 'slightly reshaped but still [...] well beyond the scope of the current EC offer' ⁽⁶²⁾.

Is it still the Commission position that a quota of this magnitude would be beyond the scope of EU offers? How does the Commission intend to limit the final agreed quota to a figure significantly below 300 000 tonnes? What figures would the Commission be willing to agree on?

Can the Commission comment on concerns that Mercosur will target the high-value end of the EU beef market in negotiations? What mitigation measures is the Commission considering to prevent Mercosur producers specifically targeting this market?

Answer

(EN) The negotiations with Mercosur were restarted in May 2010 and, even though negotiators made progress on the normative part of the agreement, there have been no discussions on market access for goods up to now. The Commission is fully aware that there are some important sensitivities for agricultural products in the EU and will take them into account when negotiating with Mercosur. Beef is obviously one of the agricultural products for which sensitivities are very high.

Both sides are currently working on the preparation of their respective offers which should be exchanged during the first quarter of 2011. On the EU side, it is clear that for the most sensitive products, including beef, account will be taken, when making any bilateral offer to Mercosur, of offers made by the EU in the Doha Development Agenda (DDA).

As discussions on concrete offers on market access have not taken place yet, it is not possible to indicate at this stage what Mercosur's priorities would be in terms of specific subsectors.

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Question no 39 by Anni Podimata (H-0651/10)

Subject: Proposal to set up a cybercrime centre

The Commission communication entitled 'The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: Five steps towards a more secure Europe' (COM(2010)0673) proposes that a 'Cybercrime Centre' should be set up by 2013.

What competences will the cybercrime centre have? What will the centre's objectives and tasks be? What professional qualifications will be required of the staff to be recruited? Where will the financial resources come from to set up such a centre? In the Commission's view, where should the centre be based?

⁽⁶¹⁾ 'Elements for a Possible Agreement' submitted by Mercosur at an EU-Mercosur meeting at coordinators level, held in Brussels on 21 March 2006

⁽⁶²⁾ Commission non-paper discussed at 133 Committee (Trade Policy Committee) on 27 April 2006 and submitted to Mercosur

Answer

(EN) The Commission's commitment made in its Communication 'The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: Five steps towards a more secure Europe' to establish a cybercrime centre is a response to the growing threat of cybercrime. It is also an acknowledgement that a better use of existing capacities at both national and European levels should be made to fight cybercrime more effectively. The Communication already indicates that among the objectives of the centre will be to 'build operational and analytical capacity for investigations and cooperation with international partners. The centre will improve evaluation and monitoring of existing preventive and investigative measures, support the development of training and awareness-raising for law enforcement and judiciary, establish cooperation with the European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) and interface with a network of national/governmental Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs). The cybercrime centre should become the focal point in Europe's fight against cybercrime'⁽⁶³⁾. These objectives are also in line with the 'Council conclusions concerning an Action Plan to implement the concerted strategy to combat cybercrime' of 26 April 2010, where the Commission is requested draw up a feasibility study on the possibility of creating the centre⁽⁶⁴⁾.

Therefore, as to the actual details regarding the responsibilities, staff, funding and the actual seat, the Commission cannot yet comment on them, as they will be subject of a feasibility study carried out in the course of 2011. A wide consultation with the Member States, relevant agencies and institutions, the private sector and civil society is expected to be conducted for the purpose of the feasibility study.

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Question no 40 by Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (H-000002/11)

Subject: 2011 budget and payments for EU farmers

After a protracted procedure, all the EU institutions finally came to an agreement on the EU budget for 2011. The EP had to back down from its initial request for a budget increase of more than 6% compared to 2010. The final compromise proposal keeps the budget increase at 2.91%, a total of €126.5 billion, despite the fact that new structures, such as the European External Action Service, will have to be financed from this small increase.

Can the Commission elaborate how these appropriations for 2011 will affect payments for Lithuanian farmers, as well as those from other EU Member States? Could the Commission provide exact figures?

Answer

(FR) The Commission would like to thank the honourable Member for asking this question, which enables it to highlight the fact that the budget adopted in December 2010 by Parliament and the Council will not affect payments for farmers in Lithuania, or for those in any other Member State of the European Union.

⁽⁶³⁾ COM(2010) 673 final

⁽⁶⁴⁾ 3010th General Affairs Council meeting, Luxembourg, 26 April 2010

In reality, the approved budget integrated the amending letter adopted by the Commission on 20 October 2010. In that amending letter, the Commission included the latest estimates for agricultural expenditure – markets and direct payments.

The budget has been drafted for the EU-27 as a whole and not per Member State. Nonetheless, the Commission can inform the honourable Member that, for Lithuania, the budget line for the SAPS includes a sum of EUR 262 million.

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