

WEDNESDAY, 14 MARCH 2012

IN THE CHAIR: MIGUEL ANGEL MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting opened at 09.00)

President. - Unfortunately, we are going to begin with bad news. As you will already know, last night, there was a terrible road accident in Switzerland involving a Belgian coach carrying 52 passengers, nearly all of them children, of whom 22 lost their lives, while others are in a serious condition.

The President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, has asked me to tell you that he will pay tribute to the victims at the beginning of the vote and there will then be a one minute's silence.

However, Ms Véronique De Keyser wishes to speak and, of course, we give her the floor; we are all concerned, and we send a message of sorrow and support to the victims' families and the injured.

Véronique De Keyser (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, you mentioned that my country was truly in a state of shock as a result of this terrible coach accident and, as we speak, the parents of those children are together in a school and still do not know whether their child is alive or dead because they have not yet been identified.

I do not think the country has ever known an accident like this one. As you said, 22 children have been killed, along with the accompanying adults and the bus driver, and some have been injured and are in a very serious condition.

As I will not have the opportunity to do so this afternoon, I would like to thank President Schulz who telephoned me at 07.15 this morning to say that he shared the sadness of the Belgian people and that he would hold a minute's silence at midday when there will be more people in this Chamber. Thank you again for your compassion.

Marianne Thyssen (PPE). - (NL) Mr President, I can only echo what Ms De Keyser has said. It is a terrible accident that has happened.

This is, I believe, the worst news that any parent could ever hear about their children.

We all, therefore, feel deep sympathy for them, and I am also pleased with the President's announcement that we will be observing a minute's silence this afternoon, when more people are present here – and the office of my group leader, Mr Daul, had, in fact, already made a request to that effect to Mr Schulz's office – because this is grief that affects us all and the kind of grief where we need to show our commiseration with the deep sorrow of all those parents and family members affected by this tragedy.

2. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

3. Implementing measures (Rule 88): see Minutes

4. Delegated acts (Rule 87a): see Minutes

5. Enlargement report for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (debate)

President. - The first item is the debate on statements by the Council and the Commission on the 2011 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (2011/2887(RSP)).

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – Mr President, before starting my speech here, I would also like to pay tribute and to extend condolences and grief from the Presidency to the victims and the families involved in that terrible accident. I believe that everyone in this Chamber feels for the victims and the families today and we will, of course, honour them later on, as has been stated. I believe that is very appropriate.

On behalf of the Danish Presidency of the Council, it is a great pleasure for me to participate in this debate and to review progress on enlargement and the accession negotiations. First of all, let me underline how much we appreciate Parliament's interest in and support for the enlargement process. Your active and constructive contribution to the wider debate on enlargement is highly valued and appreciated.

I would also like to begin these three debates today by highlighting the resilience of the EU enlargement policy. This is sometimes overlooked, not least in times of great economic hardship and uncertainty. Last December, we were able to sign the accession treaty with Croatia, which is now in the process of being ratified by national parliaments. This should allow Croatia to join the Union in July 2013. Only two weeks ago, on 1 March, the European Council granted candidate status to Serbia. Both achievements show that the political momentum behind the EU's enlargement policy is driven by the power to transform and bring about positive change. The process has brought prosperity and, even more importantly, it has proved to be a positive factor for peace and security.

I would like to turn now to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Since December 2005, the country has been a candidate for membership of the EU. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is important in the region, being fully engaged in regional initiatives such as the Regional Cooperation Council and the South-East European Cooperation Process. It also contributes to the EU Althea mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At its meeting on 5 December 2010, the Council welcomed the further progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the area of reform, as well as the fact that it is fulfilling its commitment under the stabilisation and association agreement.

The Council broadly shares the Commission's assessment of the country's sufficient fulfilment of the political criteria. Since the early elections of June last year, which followed a boycott of the parliament, the governing coalition has been stable. Let me briefly mention the progress which has been made on issues such as the reform of the parliament, the judiciary, public administration and respect for – and protection of – minorities, before I address the key challenges that remain.

We welcome the improvement, compared to 2008, of the handling of the parliamentary elections on 5 June 2011, which were competitive, transparent and well administered throughout the country. Naturally, the government needs to implement fully the conclusions and recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, particularly regarding the separation between state and party activities during the campaign period. We expect the 2013 local elections to be handled equally well as – if not better than – the 2011 elections.

We also welcome the fact that the government coalition has resolved earlier difficulties and has strengthened internal cooperation. It is important that the momentum of the reform process be maintained. Freedom of expression in the media remains a matter of concern. We welcome the opening of a dialogue on this issue. The closure, on grounds of tax evasion, of a major television channel and three newspapers which were critical of the government has raised concerns about the proportionality and selectivity of the procedure and has reduced the diversity of the media landscape. As for judicial reform, some positive progress has been achieved.

This is also the case for the amendments to the legal framework in relation to the fight against corruption. The adoption of a new criminal procedure code is a significant step forward in the fight against crime and corruption but requires further institutional work in order to be fully implemented. Corruption remains a serious problem which needs to be addressed.

Further progress has also been made in the area of cultural rights and minorities. The tenth anniversary of the Ohrid Framework Agreement provided a good opportunity for enhanced dialogue between the communities in the country. Both the letter and the spirit of the Ohrid Framework Agreement must be respected by all.

Integration of the Roma in the education system has improved, but further measures need to be taken, as the Roma continue to face very difficult living conditions and discrimination, in particular, regarding civil registration. In the area of human rights, we are concerned about cases of ill treatment by special police forces as well as discrimination against the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender community. This needs to be addressed.

Overall, the developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are encouraging. The Council has noted that the Commission has reiterated its recommendation that accession negotiations should be opened. We stand ready to return to this during our Presidency.

Let me end by recalling that maintaining good neighbourly relations – which has to include a negotiated and mutually-accepted solution with the UN to the main issue – is essential. We very much hope that the ongoing high-level dialogue will yield a positive outcome as soon as possible.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, there could hardly be a greater tragedy than when lives of young ones are taken away. Let me join you and others in an expression of deepest solidarity and grief.

I am delighted to be discussing the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia with you one week after I attended the hearing in Parliament hosted by Mr Howitt. Today will be yet another opportunity to take stock of the developments in the country during the last year.

I would like to thank especially Mr Howitt for the high-quality report we are discussing today. I am pleased that the European Parliament motion for a resolution broadly shares the Commission findings in the 2011 progress report. Once again – and the third time in a row – there is a consensus between us that accession negotiations should start. As you are aware, the Council has not acted on the recommendation but has stated its willingness to return to the issue during the Danish Presidency.

It is in this context that I am travelling to Skopje later today to launch the high-level accession dialogue. Our aim is to move the country closer to the European Union and to

keep the European Union agenda as the driving force of the transformation in the country. It is by no means a substitute for actual negotiations.

The dialogue will take forward the reform agenda in the country by achieving a clear agreement on the reforms to be taken in five key policy areas. Firstly, as regards the rule of law – which is a policy area of strategic importance to the European Union – we will associate the country with the new approach which is currently being followed with Montenegro.

Secondly, regarding freedom of expression, the Commission and Parliament agree on the importance of this in the enlargement process. As a result of our joint efforts on this, I am pleased that the first steps to address our concerns have been taken by the government in Skopje. A dialogue between the state and journalists has been established. One of the key points discussed was the decriminalisation of defamation. I therefore very much welcome the announcement by Prime Minister Gruevski and Deputy Prime Minister Arifi that defamation will be fully decriminalised.

Thirdly, public administration reforms must go forward, which means implementing the 2011 reform strategy. Fourthly, electoral reform needs to be completed. The fifth area is the development of a functioning market economy.

The Commission will continue to support the country in addressing all these challenges through targeted financial cooperation. I have taken good note of Parliament's suggestions concerning the IPA programme and the Civil Society Facility in this regard.

The Commission also agrees with your view of the importance of good neighbourly relations between the country and its neighbours and the need to increase mutual understanding. We are closely monitoring developments in this field and will assess them again in the 2012 progress report.

Finally, you have requested that the European Union should be ready to assist in resolving the name issue. The United Nations has a clear mandate to mediate on the name issue between the country and Greece. We are helping to create a climate conducive to compromise, and we are encouraging the countries to find one. For the European Union to become engaged in a more substantial way, there would have to be a clear demand by both parties.

As I have said on many occasions, it is a political reality that a solution to the name issue will greatly facilitate further progress in European integration. I welcome the fact that the two sides are re-engaging and strongly encourage them to build on the progress made in 2011.

Richard Howitt, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, I would like to start by saying how proud I have been during the past year to be appointed as rapporteur to establish a very fruitful collaboration with the shadows, to support the work of the Commissioner, whom I deeply respect, and to become even more convinced that this is a country which belongs inside the European Union.

It is why I endorse the call for EU accession talks to start 'without delay' in paragraph 1, sentence 1 of the resolution: no qualifications. It is why I have tabled an amendment endorsing the high-level accession dialogue due to begin tomorrow, not as an alternative to talks, but as an opportunity for progress which cannot be missed.

I point to the improvement in elections that I witnessed and in parliamentary cooperation, to economic progress, to judicial and public service reform. I do not see as criticism the words of those who call me friendly to the country, because friendly criticism is precisely what is needed. On war crimes, freedom of media, discrimination, police ill-treatment and on the Roma, look at the resolution and you will find such friendly but robust criticism. And the decision to abolish the crime of defamation against journalists is indeed demonstration that our demands are being heard and acted upon.

It is why those who wish to delete my reference to the country's success in the basketball championships are wrong. It shows that we can appreciate the difference between legitimate national pride at the same time as warning against illegitimate political nationalism. For those who are erecting hoops through which the country must jump, it is one very apt metaphor that they can do it.

But the warnings are not just to the country, but to ourselves, not least in the incidence of ethnic conflict over the last week. As I was told in the country: for stability, like a bicycle, you need to keep moving forward.

And that includes the name issue. Despite the Hague judgment, I repeat today that there is no shortcut to a negotiated solution. But to those who seek to delete paragraph 15 even though it meets the UN accord: you would be sending a signal that we do not understand the feelings of the people of the country or express our desire to back a solution which is fair and just to all. And to colleagues from neighbouring countries who have negotiated with me have seen how I sought to be flexible and inclusive: just as you rightly call on Skopje to avoid provocations, in the way that you speak today and in the way that you vote, I call on you to demonstrate the very same commitment.

Shortly, this country will take over the chair of the Regional Cooperation Council. It hosted the meeting of Ministers of European Integration from across the Balkans in the wake of this year's Commission progress reports. It is a country which has excellent relations with both Serbia and Kosovo. Its progress points to the European future of every single one of the countries, but there has to be a European future for every one of the countries, which is why this is the debate which must be heard; these are the obligations which must be met on all sides; this is a country which cannot be left behind.

Eduard Kukan, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, first, I would like to congratulate Mr Howitt on this good report. We agreed to reiterate in it our call on the Council to open the accession negotiations without further delay. I fully support this call as I am convinced that, in order to trigger more developments, the country needs to work on a positive agenda and the negotiation with the EU is exactly that positive agenda.

The more we prolong the gap between the candidate status and negotiations, the less credible the EU policy could become in the Balkans. Otherwise, I am afraid there will be some substituting agenda in some programmes as we see, for example, in the area of inter-ethnic relations in the country. Therefore, I fully support Commissioner Füle's initiative to leave the higher level accession dialogue focused on the most difficult areas in the future negotiations. The main areas where progress is still needed are freedom of the media, reform in judicial and public administration and the fight against corruption. They need to be addressed promptly.

Finally, Macedonia has a realistic chance to move forward in the EU integration process, yet it is also our responsibility to make this happen.

Norica Nicolai, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (RO) Mr President, I wish to thank Mr Howitt for his cooperation. I think that we managed together to draft an objective report, but I cannot refrain from confessing the frustration I feel again this year because negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have not yet started. I believe that Macedonia may be a specific case of questioning our efficiency and motivation in relation to the accession process of some Member States. I believe that the dispute regarding the name – and this especially in relation to the decision of the International Court of Justice in The Hague – can no longer be an impediment to the European course of the country.

Beyond the criticisms that can be addressed to this Member State, as well as to others, we have to admit that there are specific situations also in states that are members of the European Union and that are facing the same kind of issues; I mean the freedom of the media, the efficiency of justice, the status of functional market economy. However, beyond these issues, I think that the European course of Macedonia should not be impeded, nor discouraged by applying palliatives, as we are currently trying to do. We have proposed in this report an arbitration in which the European Union is to become actively involved in complying with judicial decisions and in the attempt to find legally objective solutions for the European course of a country to not be impeded.

Apart from this, I think that judicial reform is essential for Macedonia and, in that respect, progress, significant progress even, was made. Of course, it must continue, but we cannot ignore the way in which the laws on the Criminal Procedure Code and the status and independence of judges have been dealt with, nor can we ignore the fact that progress was made in the context of the Ohrid Framework Agreement ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Marije Cornelissen, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, I keep thinking how wonderful it would be if we could hold a debate about the country without the name being such an issue. If we could just concentrate on the progress and on the hard work that still lies ahead, there is enough to do as regards more fundamental rights: stopping corruption and reforming the economy and the labour market. Bizarrely, reaching a solution should not be too hard. Greece has made an offer for a composite name with a geographical denomination, and Macedonia has always stated that what it finds most important is that its identity, culture, nationality and language are not questioned. We would like to give the process a small but significant push by applauding the offer, so we have put in an amendment.

I hope that other groups will vote in favour of this and – who knows? – maybe next year, we will be back here and freely speak about ‘North Macedonia’ in which Macedonian people with Macedonian identities and Macedonian culture happily speak Macedonian.

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

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI), *Blue-card question*. – (BG) Mr President, Ms Cornelissen, I am addressing you as a speaker on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance because the Group of the Greens is renowned for its fairly serious position on defending human rights and the rights of minorities. I would like to ask you whether you are aware that the rights of people who consider themselves Bulgarian continue to be violated in Macedonia, and what is the position of the Group of the Greens on this issue?

Marije Cornelissen (Verts/ALE), *Blue-card answer*. – I think that discrimination against whatever national group or other minority or even against women should be firmly

combated. Some groups should be singled out by mentioning them – the LGBT community is one of them. I have no problem with a mention of Bulgarians but I would find it important to have a nuanced vision on this because there is a bit of going back and forth between Bulgaria and Macedonia in stigmatisation and stereotyping. But, if there is discrimination, it should be combated.

Marina Yannakoudakis, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, my group supports the call for this resolution to welcome FYROM to the EU as soon as possible. As a member of the Delegation to the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, I have been following the debate with great interest. I have been following the areas such as inter-ethnic reconciliation, fundamental rights and reforms and public administration. They all show some sign of improvement and I hope that this will continue.

FYROM has also made steps towards improving its human rights. Now I understand the importance and cultural significance of the name issue and I hope that this will be resolved in due course by the parties concerned. What we need to do is to ensure that the groundwork is prepared for FYROM to become a full member when it meets the required EU criteria.

Nikolaos Chountis, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (EL) Mr President, I must repeat once again that our position, the position of the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, and my personal position, is that FYROM can and must become a member of the European Union, if its people so wish. However, I cannot congratulate Richard Howitt, because I think that there are problematic areas in his motion for a resolution.

The first problematic area is the question of the name because, as long as we address this as a bilateral issue, instead of an international problem being addressed in the UN, we are not sending out the right message to the FYROM government to take the steps needed to resolve the problem. As long as this problem is not resolved, whatever anybody says, the FYROM government of the day will be unable to focus on the problems to which my colleagues referred and which need to be addressed in order to get on with the question of its accession to the European Union.

Secondly, I do not consider that accession to the European Union has anything to do with whether or not a country belongs to NATO and whether or not it is involved in NATO campaigns. Since when did we think up this new criterion, which basically turns the country into a means of serving US interests in the East?

The third problem is that, while FYROM is a country with unemployment and poverty, we are basically recommending – not to say insisting on – the conservative, neoliberal policies that resulted in crisis and will exacerbate these problems.

That is why I disagree with Richard Howitt's motion for a resolution.

Nikolaos Salavrakos, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (EL) Mr President, the Commission's progress report maps shortcomings in crucial sectors, such as freedom of expression, justice, the public administration, corruption and numerous others, and contains stricter recommendations than last year's progress report.

However, I fear that the author of the motion for a resolution has opted for a worse approach, a much less realistic approach than that taken by Mr Füle and Mr Wammen, who discreetly raised the question of the name. The author, on the other hand, has endeavoured, via the side door, to go beyond the instruction given to him to draft a motion

for a resolution on FYROM and has tried, in paragraph 15, to take a stand and to formulate a name in an underhand manner.

Using such word tricks is unacceptable and goes beyond the bounds of legality, because it does not promote democracy or good neighbourly relations or proper cooperation between the Member States, values which the European Parliament espouses and, more to the point, it does not make a positive contribution to the negotiations to find a mutually acceptable solution.

I was also surprised by paragraph 62, in which he congratulates the country on the strong performance of its team in the European Basketball Championship. Are we serious? I think that this reference denigrates FYROM and turns the motion for a resolution into the sports page.

I wish to emphasise one thing: that we politicians should not generate false hopes. FRYOM is a country that, I hope, will, in the future, meet all the criteria for accession and will, at some point, join the European Union. Today, however, it does not meet those criteria.

Elmar Brok (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Wammen, Mr Füle, ladies and gentlemen, it seems important to me that we can welcome the fact that there has been a report of a basketball victory, because it is a way of expressing our empathy. I have also felt pleased in the past when Greece won the European basketball championship.

I believe it is important for us, after a long period of making promises, to finally open negotiations with this country. It is essential that we make progress, because stability in the Western Balkans is a crucial point. Now that the process with Croatia has been successfully concluded, we should take the next step. In my opinion, we also need to offer hope for the future and show that we take the Thessaloniki agenda seriously.

However, every country must also meet its obligations in full and I am slightly concerned that the ethnic conflicts, which are now obviously turning into religious conflicts, will make this more problematic. In order to achieve a successful outcome, I believe it is important that internal disputes do not break out again, that the Ohrid Framework Agreement is followed, and that the groups can be reconciled.

I really think that Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should both resolve their name issues. I genuinely do not understand either side in this dispute. They should be able to come to an agreement over a question like this. The future of Europe must not be allowed to depend on this and, therefore, I think it is right for us to call on the two countries to resolve this issue, which is not of great importance, so that we can finally start to discuss the serious questions.

Libor Rouček (S&D). - Mr President, first of all, let me say, on behalf of the Socialists and Democrats, that we are pleased to see that, despite the financial and economic crisis we are facing, the Union enlargement policy is gaining new momentum, especially in the Western Balkans. As the Minister has already said, enlargement is one of the most successful policies. In my view, and in the view of my group, it should stay so. It should remain strong and robust.

Of course, we should capitalise on the positive dynamics facilitated by Serbia's candidate status. It should also be a good example for the neighbouring countries that, if they work hard and implement reforms, they can go on the same path.

As far as FYROM is concerned, we regret that the December 2011 International Court of Justice ruling did not translate into any constructive movement towards the resolution of the name issue. I think it is tragic that the name issue can hinder the enlargement process for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We believe that it is in the interests of both the Macedonian people and the Greek people and, of course, all Europeans, that this issue is solved as soon as possible and that this country can move forward.

In this context, I would like to welcome the new high-level accession dialogue led by Commissioner Füle. I want to wish him every success tomorrow when he starts the accession talks. Of course there are some priorities, but I do not have time to mention them. Focus on them and we wish you good luck.

I would like to thank our rapporteur, Richard Howitt, for an excellent report.

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

Nikolaos Salavrakos (EFD), *Blue-card question.* – (EL) Mr President, my dear colleague, leaving aside the name, forget the name and tell me this: based on what you have read in the motion for a resolution, based on what we have heard in the House about shortcomings in terms of democracy, human rights abuses and corruption, do you consider that this country is fit, today, for candidate status? On what do you base that?

Libor Rouček (S&D), *Blue-card answer.* – Mr Salavrakos, FYROM is a candidate country. I recognise and the report recognises that, yes, there are many shortcomings. The Macedonian Government is aware of that situation; I think the whole society is working on improving that situation.

But what I would like to say to you as a Greek is that your country – the whole region – is in economic trouble. Would it not be better if the whole region cooperated, if we created a positive atmosphere, economic cross-country and cross-border cooperation, and, through this cooperation, we could improve the well-being of the entire region, including Greece?

(Applause)

Mirosław Piotrowski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted the status of candidate country for European Union membership in 2005, which was over six years ago now. Accession negotiations with FYROM have still not started, mainly because of the bilateral dispute over the country's name. Supporters of opening accession negotiations with FYROM say that under no circumstances should the dispute be an obstacle in this process. We cannot accept this claim uncritically – it is important for the EU's Member States to maintain harmonious relations. In this case, the matter concerns Greece, and we must not see Greece's position as being weakened because of the domestic financial crisis there. On the one hand, everything should be done to ensure that starting negotiations does not mean dragging the EU into local conflicts, but, on the other hand, we need to stimulate deeper discussion on the strategy for further enlargement of the EU in the context of the grave financial crisis.

Marietta Giannakou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, the European Commission's report is perfectly clear on the situation in this neighbouring country and, of course, recommends the opening of accession negotiations.

Everyone who has commented on this issue has maintained that a supposedly bilateral difference cannot prevent a country from joining the European Union. However, the

problem is not the name; it is the propaganda, the attempt to backdate the problem and the attempt to fly in the face of history and logic.

Everyone who maintains that, for the sake of stability, we should forget this issue, as a result of which young people are being taught a rewritten version of the facts, is sorely mistaken. We cannot accept, and no Greek Government can accept, despite the economic problems – because I caught the hint made by my colleague – that accession negotiations can be opened with this country before the problem has been resolved.

May I remind you that the Council alone is responsible for this issue and I therefore consider that, instead of encouraging this country to persist in its unbelievable propaganda, which stems from its old historic status (I refer to the communist bloc and its plans), it would be better if you told this country exactly what it must do if it wants good neighbourly relations with other countries.

Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D). – (EL) Mr President, all of us here believe that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia should join the Euro-Atlantic institutions. At the same time, we believe that it should continue reform efforts and should resolve important problems, such as corruption and human rights abuses. The thorn, of course, that remains is the failure to resolve the problem of the name.

Despite the progress made over the past two years, Mr Gruevski is still playing the same games and refusing to take a constructive approach to dialogue. The forthcoming NATO summit is the reason why things are moving again.

We repeat: a satisfactory solution for both sides needs to be found on the basis of what has been described so many times. This solution must be determined geographically, based on its *erga omnes* obligation. Every day wasted is a lost opportunity to resolve the problem.

Despite its difficulties and despite the economic crisis, Greece has not stopped trying to find a solution. We welcome the high-level contacts with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, even though, as has clearly been said, they are not, under any circumstances, a substitute for accession negotiations. The key, if this country is to move towards the European institutions, is simply that it must resolve the issue of the name.

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

Charles Tannock (ECR), *Blue-card question.* – Mr President, I have heard a lot of mentions from the Greek side of this House – and a mention was recently made by Ms Koppa in her speech – that NATO is complicating matters. I heard a Greek Communist (I believe) say that NATO has got nothing to do with it. Of course NATO has nothing to do with it, but we do respect international law.

Would Ms Koppa not agree that the ICJ was very clear in condemning the Greek position vis-à-vis Macedonia's accession to NATO and that therefore, when she says that Greece is not at fault and that Macedonia and Gruevski's propaganda is what it is all about and that is where the fault lies, surely the ICJ is a respected international court and their judgment should have some bearing on the issue of the name question? Ms Koppa, would you like to address this please?

Maria-Eleni Koppa (S&D), *Blue-card answer.* – (EL) Mr President, we all hoped that the Court's judgment would give momentum to the negotiations and help speed up the dialogue.

However, that did not happen. As far as NATO is concerned, I consider that resolving the problem of the name would help the country move both towards the European Union and towards NATO. The key, I repeat, lies in resolving the problem of the name.

Andrey Kovatchev (PPE). – (BG) Mr President, Commissioner, the citizens of Macedonia of every ethnic group and religion must have a European future as soon as possible. This is something I sincerely wish for. Unfortunately, the ruling administration in Macedonia clearly does not seem to be working towards this and is failing to take the European Parliament's recommendations seriously so far.

The continuing dissemination of mono-ethnic historical myths and legends, the promotion of pseudo-scientific research and the funding of propaganda films like 'The Third Half' ultimately heighten the conflict both within the country and with its neighbours. Recent events – the rise in inter-ethnic tension – are extremely worrying.

Anyone who thinks that the dispute with Greece is the only problem that this country has is simply being politically blind and needs to open their eyes. This dispute is merely the tip of the iceberg. Unfortunately, it is still an issue in Macedonia for you to declare openly your Bulgarian ethnic identity or origin. I hope that Macedonia will break any ties with the ethnically-based ideological inheritance of 'Yugo-communism' and work at building bridges with its neighbours. Building these bridges involves referring to common historical events and putting an end to hate talk, especially in the media and schoolbooks.

We should not bring up young people, the younger generations in the Balkans who need to live in peace and prosperity, in an atmosphere of hate. I sincerely hope and wish for such a future policy from Macedonia so that its citizens have a future in Europe.

György Schöpflin (PPE). – Mr President, I think this is a thorough and illuminating report, yet the topic of this debate has a decidedly bizarre aspect. There is no agreement – it has been very clear – on what the country that we are discussing should actually be called. I am going to call it 'Macedonia'. Of course it could always be called 'FYROM/Macedonia', but if we try to look at the issue in the round, we can see the absurdity of it all. I cannot think of a single precedent for when a country has come under pressure regarding what it calls itself, in sum because one of its neighbours decided one day to object to the name 'Macedonia'. Note that the name never bothered this neighbour while Macedonia was a part of Yugoslavia.

This would be weird enough in itself, but to use the name issue to deny Macedonia the right to open negotiations for EU membership can properly be called inexcusable. For one, I certainly do not see the name question as one of the Copenhagen criteria. Worse, the dispute brings the entire enlargement process into disrepute. It really is time to find a solution.

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

Georgios Koumoutsakos (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – (EL) Mr President, my dear fellow Member, you referred to the question of the name and said that it is unprecedented for one country not to accept another country's name.

Macedonia is a geographical area. One part, the biggest part, belongs to the Hellenic Republic. Another part belongs to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and a third part belongs to Bulgaria. There are therefore three states and three nations in one area. One nation, however, and I would emphasise this, is claiming a monopoly both over the name

and the language and the history of that area. Do you believe that it is the fault of the two other nations who do not recognise the country or the nation that wants to monopolise the name?

I await your answer.

György Schöpflin (PPE), *Blue-card answer*. – I cannot do any better than to quote Shakespeare. ‘What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet’.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Georgios Koumoutsakos (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, it has consistently been Greece’s strategic aim for all the countries of the Western Balkans to aspire to and ultimately succeed in acceding to the European Union. We supported that strategic objective with the Thessaloniki agenda in 2003 and we shall do so again in 2014, when Greece again takes over the Presidency of the European Union. This is an objective that concerns all the States in the Western Balkans without exception.

However, there is one fundamental prerequisite: there must be no outstanding good neighbourhood problems that create tension and dangerous friction. That happened in the case of Slovenia and Croatia.

The problem of the name, therefore, is a real and serious problem; it may come from the past, but it is here, it is present and it is a serious political problem. By no stretch of the imagination is this a bilateral problem. Besides, Mr Nimitz, the special UN negotiator, recently called this a problem ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) Mr President, I fully agree with Mr Rouček and Mr Schöpflin, and, as a Hungarian and Central European, I do not see any other possibility than historical reconciliation, either. I find it regrettable that Greece has not shown a willingness to compromise over the past years. As a result, Macedonian citizens have already begun to lose their faith in European integration. That has paved the way for nationalist, populist governance, which, following certain bad examples, for example those of the right-wing Hungarian Government, has significantly restricted press freedom, used independent institutions for political ends, and disregards minority rights. I fully agree with Mr Brok that ethnically motivated violence, which we saw in some parts of Macedonia a week ago, gives rise to extremely serious concerns. All minorities: Bulgarians, Romanians, Albanians ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – Mr President, the resolution we are discussing today is a message of encouragement and a friendly assessment of what needs to be done so the country can move forward towards the EU. I would like to congratulate the Commissioner for his personal engagement and the decision to start a high-level dialogue as early as this week.

Macedonia can, and should, shape its identity by looking to the future and its European perspective. The Macedonian identity is an integral part of the modern European identity. Macedonian leaders should therefore end the self-imposed isolation of the country and bring its people closer to Europe. With accession to NATO, Macedonia would get security

guarantees and secure its territorial integrity; with EU membership, it would attain economic progress, regional stability and protection of human and minority rights.

It is deeply regrettable and worrying that there have been a number of ethnic-based incidents lately. Macedonia needs to preserve its multi-ethnic ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Mr President, yesterday, we debated in this Chamber the website which has been published in the Netherlands by the party of our colleagues, and we all gave a very negative response to it, of course, condemning the hate language used. However, I can tell you that, compared to the deliberate hate campaign being conducted by the Macedonian Government, the website which we debated yesterday is absolute sweetness and light.

Poor Macedonia, which was top of the global unemployment league table last year, instead of investing in the creation of new jobs, has poured EUR 2 million into making a hate film whose title I will not even mention so as not to give it any further publicity. These are acts of provocation, ladies and gentlemen. I am sure that you are very well aware of this from the nature of these acts, which have triggered five wars in the last 100 years in the Balkans, including a world war. This situation cannot continue like this and you need to ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Anna Záborská (PPE). – (SK) Mr President, regardless of our nationality or parliamentary group, we all support our Macedonian friends in the reforms that they are carrying out. Parliament has repeatedly supported negotiations with Macedonia on its accession to the European Union. I therefore ask our colleagues from Greece to take this historic opportunity and be the first builders of bridges of understanding between ancient Greek culture and the young Macedonian state. Protection of identity and the right to self-determination are among the fundamental European values. If we query them, we will lose a strong point that we also need to overcome the economic crisis. Where one blocks everyone else, the community ceases to exist, and where there is no community, it is difficult to expect solidarity.

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE). – (SL) Mr President, I think the fundamental message of this debate was expressed by my fellow Members, who said that accession negotiations for the entry of Macedonia to the European Union should begin as soon as possible. Only this will curb or even put an end to the various nationalistic theories that are appearing, which always were a festering wound in relations between the Balkan nations. Even today, we have, unfortunately, heard much of this rhetoric.

I think the time has come for Greece to think about the fact that it is actually international solidarity which is helping to resolve her problems at the moment, and that this is probably a good time for her to show some empathy towards her neighbours. This also goes for some of Macedonia's other neighbours.

I wish Commissioner Füle the best of luck in Skopje.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, I would like to support the initiative of the European Commission, which recommends the starting of official negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on that country's accession to the union of states of the European Union. In recent years, the country has undertaken far-reaching reforms

to its political and judicial system, and I think that the statements by the monitoring bodies that the country is meeting all its obligations under association agreements confirm the correctness of the proposal to start negotiations.

The decision of the European Court of Justice regarding the name of the country and the consent of the United Nations to the carrying out of mediation between Greece and the candidate country give us hope that it will be possible to resolve this particular problem of the country's name in a civilised manner. I therefore think it is necessary to begin negotiations and to let the appropriate authorities carry out mediation regarding the name of the country.

Milan Zver (PPE). – (SL) Mr President, Commissioner, as a member of the Friends of Macedonia Group, I, of course, warmly welcome the key message of this resolution, which calls on the Council to open negotiations.

Many people have misgivings, some historical in nature, others ethnic, some simply due to their own expectations and interests, but I think we must act differently in the 21st century and look towards peace and stability in the region for a solution. This is particularly important for the Balkans.

Progress is undeniable. We have three successive reports from the European Commission, together with last year's court decision in the Hague, and I think it is time for the European Union to cut the Gordian knot and allow Macedonia to begin accession negotiations.

I see Macedonia as a country with a mature attitude, a mature player, which is already taking on its international obligations.

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) Mr President, it is mandatory for all countries wishing to join the European Union to comply with the Copenhagen criteria, which includes guaranteeing minority rights. Special attention needs to be paid to this when assessing the integration efforts of the Western Balkan countries, since we are all familiar with the ethnic relations in the region and events of the none too distant past. The European integration of the region should only occur follow reassuring resolution of inter-ethnic relations in a lasting way to the satisfaction of all the national communities. I say this with regret since, for the people of the region, it would be welcome for accession to occur at the earliest possible juncture, and it is true that the means to resolve the matters at issue would also be available after accession. However, practical experience shows that the common institutions of the EU do not deal with the problem of the national minorities living in the Member States and the Copenhagen criteria are, unfortunately, only mandatory before accession.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, I think the best antidote to euroscepticism, which is rather rife at the moment, is to have countries actually wanting to join the European Union. Together with Croatia next year, there are a number of candidate countries and now we are discussing FYROM.

The name FYROM is unfortunate. While, from a distance, it does not make sense, I can understand for those closer to it that they may have issues. At the same time, to call anything 'former' is not very complimentary. If my country was called 'the former British colony of Ireland', I do not think we would be too happy. I think we should set a deadline by which this is to be resolved so that the name reflects its current status rather than the former one.

Moving on from there, we should get it to comply with the Copenhagen criteria on issues such as the economy, media, women's rights, children's rights and so forth. I look forward to FYROM, with a proper name, joining the European Union.

Alojz Peterle (PPE). – (SL) Mr President, Slovenia has been mentioned repeatedly today as an argument in relation to Croatia. I would like to state that Slovenia did not block the opening of this negotiating process and has only reacted in this way once, when Croatia claimed disputed borders in its accession documentation. Then it was agreed that the bilateral issue would be resolved outside the context of the accession process. In this sense, I think it is a good example.

I agree with the rapporteur that it is time for Macedonia to move from the agony of the waiting room to the negotiating table. We might legitimately hold very different opinions of the past, as is the case all over the world, but this does not mean that the pull of history is stronger than the desire for a common future.

I hope that Macedonia, which has made progress, also meets with approval in keeping with the European spirit.

Vytautas Landsbergis (PPE). – Mr President, as the resolution is calling again for a name compromise between the different positions of the country deprived of a name and Greece – which is never called a Former Part of the Ottoman Empire – we should take a role in the tabling of possible compromises. May I suggest they should be directed not at the past, but at the future?

We should not favour such names for our European partners as the Former Small Part of Alexander's Empire Macedonia, or the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, but rather the Future EU Member State of Macedonia, thus preferring the European future to the less fortunate past. In the same way, we should oppose anyone's request to call Ukraine a Former Part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, or the Former Soviet Republic of Ukraine. Let us look to the future.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, in 2011, the country continued to sufficiently fulfil the political criteria, and the Commission therefore reconfirmed its recommendation to open accession negotiations. Nevertheless, we called for the pace of reforms to be intensified, in particular, in the area of freedom of expression, and we therefore welcome the fact that the government of the country is listening to our remarks.

Today's discussions are evidence of the close alignment of views between Parliament and the Commission on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in particular, and on enlargement policy in general. The discussions have focused on the areas where reform is urgently needed as well as the importance of the European Union fulfilling its commitments towards the country.

I will bring the views expressed here today with me when I travel to Skopje. There, I will meet with Prime Minister Gruevski and his government and have a qualitatively new, structured discussion on the country's reform process. By taking forward our cooperation in this way, we aim to create a new commitment to reforms and to boost the country's European perspective. I also believe that a convincing track record of reforms can contribute to creating a positive political climate, which remains essential in order to clear the road for the start of accession negotiations in the near future.

Let me add the following personal remark. I have never failed to call on both Skopje and Athens to find a solution to the name issue through joint efforts and joint compromise. Within that framework, let me make the following two remarks. First, one of the lessons learned from Europe's sometimes challenging past is that the best way to care about the well-being and future of your own people – citizens – is also to care about your neighbours and the way you are perceived by them. Secondly, another lesson learned is that your – our – identity, while having strong roots in the past, is defined by your – our – present and future steps.

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (DA) Mr President, Commissioner Füle, honourable Members, I would like to start by congratulating Mr Howitt on the extensive and sterling work that he has done on this issue. I would also like to definitively state that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has taken a number of positive steps forward over recent years. The country has demonstrated political will and produced tangible results which have helped to ensure sound democratic and economic development, particularly since the elections last year. I am convinced that these efforts will continue throughout the remainder of 2012.

Progress has been made in a number of different areas, for example, the reform of parliament, which took place at the same time as progress was evident in connection with the parliamentary elections held on 5 June 2011. I am pleased that a dialogue has now been initiated concerning the outstanding issues relating to freedom of expression in the media. In a democratic society, it is crucial that there is diversity in the media landscape. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has also made progress in respect of judicial reforms. It is good that steps have been taken to increase the judicial system's independence and improve its efficiency. There is no doubt that a well-functioning and independent judicial authority will be crucial for meeting the EU's criteria. However, it is worth mentioning that the independence of the judicial system and professional access to it, for example, are still in need of improvement.

With regard to the fight against corruption, there have been adjustments to the legal framework. However, corruption continues to be a serious problem for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The public administration framework has been improved, but challenges still remain in relation to ensuring that recruitment is based on merit to a much greater degree than it has been up to now. The country has also made progress in the area of cultural rights and the rights of minorities, and the 10th anniversary of the Ohrid Framework Agreement thus provided a good opportunity for increased dialogue between the various population groups in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was granted candidate status in 2005 and the country has unremittingly carried out reforms with a view to making further progress. The EU has held out the prospect of EU membership for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and that is an obligation that the EU must fulfil. I understand those Members who, in the debate today, have expressed their disappointment at the fact that we have still not succeeded in taking the decision to initiate accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. At the same time, it is also clear that it is the responsibility of a country which, in the long term, wishes to attain membership of the EU to maintain a constructive dialogue with its neighbouring countries. The name issue is a bilateral one, which ought to be resolved in a way that is acceptable to both parties. That is important in terms of it being possible to achieve agreement concerning the initiation of accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I sincerely hope that we

will see progress in this area in the near future, and I would like to wish Commissioner Füle luck with the forthcoming talks. The future of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is in Europe. Let us take the right steps to ensure that this happens as quickly as possible.

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

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today, Wednesday, 14 March, at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Kinga Gál (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) I am pleased that the draft resolution deals emphatically with questions such as the peaceful cohabitation of the Macedonian nations and the situation of the national minorities. A separate part of the text addresses the significance of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed 10 years ago, which is based on the principle of mutual respect for national identity and laid the foundation for resolving inter-ethnic conflicts. The laws which were adopted and amended in line with the agreement are to be welcomed. However, as I have already mentioned in other speeches, all laws are only worth as much as the extent of their practical implementation. A fundamental condition of peaceful cohabitation is the suitable education of the next generation and the fostering of sensitivity and a positive relationship towards one's neighbours.

A new generation growing up in such a spirit is key to the creation of a multicultural civil society that is independent and open. It needs to be ensured that all children can study from appropriate textbooks in their own native language.

However, it is equally important, if not more so, that children become familiar not only with their own language and culture, but also with the languages, cultures and histories of their traditional fellow peoples from a young age. Such projects fostering mutual understanding, as well as existing civil organisations, need to be supported emphatically using the Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance. One way of promoting understanding between neighbouring nations and the development of good neighbourly relations could be to establish a history committee composed of experts from the cohabiting peoples. These measures can prevent discrimination based on nationality and foster mutual acceptance and the assumption of ethnic identity.

Jiří Havel (S&D), *in writing.* – (CS) I would like to begin by congratulating Richard Howitt, the new rapporteur, on a fine piece of work. The draft of the text clearly shows that he has successfully mastered the art of jumping onto a moving train. We nevertheless still have not resolved the greatest problem – the dispute over the name. The bid made by Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Füle – in line with our recommendation last year – to facilitate an agreement over the name has not yet resulted in the necessary progress, despite all efforts. We should therefore perhaps consider changing the mediation approach. The EU should submit a proposal to the UN for an EU representative to become mediator, or for the matter to be transferred from the competence of the UN to the competence of the EU. This proposal is motivated, above all, by the fact that negotiations have remained stuck on the same point for years, with no prospect of any change. I therefore consider it

(1) See Minutes

right to take steps that might lead to an unblocking of the situation. It is impossible, of course, to guarantee that such a change will bring any positive movement. The current path, however, is clearly going nowhere. The EU might at least seize the initiative in this way.

6. Enlargement report for Iceland (debate)

President. - The next item is the debate on the statements by the Council and the Commission on the 2011 progress report on Iceland (2011/2884(RSP)).

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – Mr President, honourable Members, Commissioner Füle, let us now turn to Iceland and underline a number of points which are also duly reflected in your resolution.

On 5 December last year, the Council welcomed the Commission's progress report on Iceland and took good note of its findings and recommendations. Iceland has indeed made good progress over the last year and has continued to do so in the first months of 2012. The process of screening the *acquis* is almost complete, and there is good momentum in the negotiations.

Last week, I had the opportunity to go to Iceland, where I met with leaders in Icelandic politics, including the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister and other leaders. I made it very clear that we want to continue this process in a very constructive dialogue.

Due to its membership of the European Economic Area and Schengen, Iceland has come to the negotiations with another starting point. In a large number of policy fields, Iceland already lives up to – or is very close to – the *acquis*. In this regard, it is worth noticing that we managed to simultaneously open and close the very symbolic Chapter 23 on judicial matters.

I would also like to add that Iceland benefits from a very professional administration and a very committed and professional negotiating team, also at political level. This impression was strongly confirmed when I met with the Icelandic leadership a short while ago.

The Council is committed to moving the negotiation process forward. As the Presidency, we take this mandate very seriously and will push those negotiations forward as much as possible within the merit-based approach. It is clear to all that there can be no shortcuts to membership for any countries and that Iceland will, of course, have to satisfy the same criteria in the enlargement negotiations as the other candidate countries.

In December last year, the Council noted with satisfaction Iceland's progress in stabilising its economy. The recovery from the economic and financial collapse in 2008 and 2009 is well under way. This is not least due to responsible macro-economic policies and tough decisions on structural and welfare reforms. Also due to this, Iceland successfully completed its IMF programme in August 2011 and has just recently seen itself upgraded by the rating agency Fitch.

Iceland still faces challenges. But with the current economic outlook, we are convinced that Iceland will be able to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union over the medium term.

Let me move on to the state of the actual negotiations. We have now almost completed the screening process, which is a process that examines Iceland's level of alignment with

the *acquis*. The Council has already received and dealt with all screening reports except those from the fishery chapters. We expect to receive that report around Easter. As for the negotiations of the 35 negotiation chapters, 11 chapters have now been opened and eight have been provisionally closed, thanks to the efforts of previous presidencies.

This is a remarkable result, which underlines Iceland's very high level of preparedness for membership. It also represents momentum to be upheld, which we will do everything possible to achieve.

The next accession conference with Iceland at deputy level is planned for 30 March. This should allow us to take stock of progress and send clear signals as to Iceland's and the EU's shared commitment to uphold momentum. We hope to open at least three new chapters concerning competition policy, energy, and foreign security and defence policy, and also to provisionally close some of those chapters.

The accession conference at ministerial level planned for June will confirm the results of the accession conference in March and sustain the momentum in the negotiations by opening and provisionally closing a further number of chapters.

All in all, we expect negotiations to continue at very good speed this semester. Some more challenging negotiations, such as those on fisheries, lie ahead of us. However, given the commitment and focus from the Icelandic side, we are very confident that, with the right amount of goodwill and political determination, substantial progress can be achieved in these areas as well. I am convinced of the commitment of all parties to bring the negotiations forward.

In conclusion, the aim of the Presidency is to sustain momentum in the negotiations and bring them forward as much as possible. This is a task that we can only achieve with the support and cooperation of the Member States, the Commission and, not least, this Parliament, as this debate will show.

Let me also, on behalf of the Danish Presidency and the Member States, thank this Parliament and, in particular, your rapporteur, Mr Preda, for the work done on this issue. Your continued commitment to enlargement is vital to its success – as is, of course, your particular role in promoting popular support in the EU for this cause.

The resolution on Iceland and its endorsement in plenary is indeed a forceful political and strategic message. I also believe that, through contacts with fellow parliamentarians from the Althingi in Iceland, this House will be able to make an important and much-needed contribution to enhancing understanding of the EU, the values that we share and the way we work.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, it is a great pleasure for me to contribute today to your debate on Iceland's accession and to hear your views on this ambitious project.

I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Preda, on his comprehensive report, which – in my view – is right to the point and well balanced. Since the official opening of the negotiations with Iceland in July 2010, 11 chapters have been opened, out of which eight have now been provisionally closed. This well reflects Iceland's own merits, its advanced stage of integration with the European Union as a member of the European Economic Area, and the proper functioning of the established enlargement methodology.

Let me also point out that the most recent internal market scoreboard of the European Free Trade Area members of the European Economic Area shows that Iceland is transposing the relevant *acquis* much better than the average Member State. With 0.5%, it is well below the 1% transposition deficit target set by the European Council of March 2007. Just to add for comparison: the average European Union Member State transposition deficit is 1.2%.

The Commission, together with the Icelandic authorities and the Danish and Cypriot Presidencies, is working to build on this momentum to open as many chapters of the *acquis* as possible in 2012. All the screening reports have now been presented to the Council with the exception of the one on fisheries which is close to completion. We hope to open up to four chapters at the next accession conference on 30 March.

Let us be clear: 2012 will be a decisive year as we are getting ready to start, as soon as possible, negotiations on some of the core chapters, such as on fisheries, agriculture, food safety and environment. In doing so, we will always privilege quality over speed.

Let me now briefly turn to issues of particular interest that were raised by Cristian Preda in his report. Iceland was among the first countries to undergo the detrimental effects of the financial crisis and has imposed a number of austerity measures. Thanks to its effort, the economic recovery has continued over the last months with an estimated growth of over 3% for 2012. Iceland should be commended for these efforts.

Let me briefly mention the pre-accession financial support measures that we are providing to Iceland. A total indicative envelope of some EUR 30 million is foreseen for the years 2011-2013, to support strengthening the country's administrative capacity. The TAIEX instrument is fully operational in a wide range of *acquis*-related fields.

We are also providing the pre-accession support for information activities. There is a need for a well-informed and balanced debate about the accession process within the European Union and in Iceland. I therefore very much welcome the opening early this year of the European Union Information Centre in Reykjavik. The Centre will play an important role in enabling the Icelandic population to make an informed decision on their European future.

Most opinion polls indicate that the majority of Icelanders are in favour of continuing the accession talks and are willing to exercise their right of decision on a final deal. In spite of the diverging views on European Union accession that exist in Iceland, the progress achieved since our last meeting strongly illustrates Iceland's commitment to its European Union aspiration and its determination to overcome the challenges ahead.

Cristian Dan Preda, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (RO) Mr President, here we are in the second year when we have a progress report on Iceland's accession to the EU and, frankly, progress is visible. Even though, this time last year, no negotiation chapter had yet been opened or closed, now we can speak, as Mr Wammen and Commissioner Füle said, about eleven negotiating chapters that have been opened, of which eight have been provisionally closed.

In the past year, we have also been able to witness the intensification of debate in Iceland regarding the accession to the EU, rendered, among other things, by the reactions caused precisely by point 6 of the resolution we are going to vote on in a few hours. As I pointed out in my dialogue with the Icelandic media, it is natural for the European Parliament to take note of the restructuring of the Icelandic Government and express its confidence that

the new government team will continue negotiations with a stronger and more sustained commitment to the accession process.

Recent discussions aroused by the proposal that Iceland should adopt the Canadian Dollar or the Japanese Yen as own currency show, in fact, that the Icelandic public needs an informed debate about the pros and cons of joining the European Union. I appreciated, in this context, the intervention of Iceland's Prime Minister, stating that, in fact, the choice lies between being a Member State with full rights of the European Union and the euro area and, respectively, giving up sovereignty by unilateral adoption of a foreign currency.

I therefore conclude by stressing the importance of the debate, as both Icelandic and European citizens need to know each other and be willing to be part of a community.

Göran Färm, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (SV) Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Preda, for his excellent cooperation. It feels good to be able to send a clear signal to Iceland that we are looking forward to having the country in the EU family. It would be good to have a new Member State with such a strong democratic tradition and a market economy that, in fact, is now operating well.

Membership of the European Economic Area and Schengen means that Iceland is already involved in close cooperation with the EU and has made a great deal of progress in its preparations for accession. It is therefore gratifying that the people of Iceland and its parliament want to complete the membership negotiations. I hope that we can now also have a constructive and serious debate on Iceland with regard to what EU membership entails.

Since I am a member of the Committee on Budgets and led a committee delegation to Iceland last year, I should also point out that Iceland's accession will not place any burden on the EU budget. In several areas, I believe that the EU could even learn a few important things from Iceland. I am thinking of Iceland's approach to getting out of the economic crisis. The country has successfully implemented the International Monetary Fund's recovery programme without the one-dimensional austerity measures that have, sadly, been forced on Greece, and it has successfully introduced strict measures for controlling the financial sector.

I am thinking of the fact that Iceland's membership could give the EU a more active role in the Arctic and thus help to bring about sustainable solutions in this sensitive region. I am also thinking of EU fisheries policy, in respect of which we could learn a great deal from Iceland's more sustainable fisheries model ahead of the EU's forthcoming reform, and of energy policy, which is an area where Iceland, which obtains almost all of its energy from renewable sources, could make a valuable contribution as a result of its world-leading expertise on geothermal energy in particular.

However, we still need to have a sensitive discussion with Iceland with regard to the abolition of whaling and the sale of whale products, and there are a few fisheries and agricultural issues still to be resolved. I look forward to welcoming Iceland as a member of the EU, but I am, of course, well aware that the outcome of the forthcoming referendum on EU membership is by no means a foregone conclusion. In order for this outcome to be a 'yes' vote, we need, above all, a smart agreement on fisheries policy.

Johannes Cornelis van Baalen, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – Mr President, as all other speakers have said, Iceland is a modern country with a very democratic tradition. It can be an asset to the European Union. If we look today, indeed, the people of Iceland and its

government have pulled themselves out of the economic crisis without looking back in anger but looking forward, as the people in Ireland have also done, and this is a big achievement.

Of course there are matters still to be considered. One important thing in this case is that in Iceland, the grip of the state on the economy is too great, so they should open their economy to foreign investments, foreign ownership, and indeed competition. This is an important point.

The other thing concerns Icesave. I am from the Netherlands. Concerning the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, you can see that the obligations under Icesave have been taken seriously by the Icelandic Government and that the Icelanders are paying back money, so I am confident that they will fulfil all their obligations. Of course we need to monitor, but the prospects are good.

In other words, apart from sustainable fisheries – and I think we have to have a deal on this, a commitment – we can look to future Icelandic EU membership soon and indeed, together with the authorities and the population of Iceland, we have to convince the population that the route to Europe is the best one for such an old and democratic country in such a modern environment.

IN THE CHAIR: ALEXANDER ALVARO

Vice-President

Indrek Tarand, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (ET) Mr President, since today is Mother Tongue Day in Estonia, I would like to honour it with a speech in Estonian.

Firstly, we should note that Iceland may become a global leader in information and freedom of expression, primarily thanks to the IMMI – the International Modern Media Initiative – and for that reason, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance has tabled an amendment that includes the IMMI in our report, and I would like to ask all those who can to vote in favour of it.

Secondly, we have differences of opinion on the topic of mackerel quotas, and the report's appeal to the parties is very precise and appropriate, but the phrase that refers to historic fishing rights should be voted out, because if we examine the history of the planet, it immediately becomes clear that the fish were here before the humans, and historic fishing rights fall into the same category as the phrase 'former Danish Republic of Iceland'.

Thirdly, Iceland has at least one big lesson for us. In this parliament, we continually speak of the need to ensure a greater female participation in management, but of the nine members of the Icelandic Government, a full five are women, which makes the country a unique example for all 27 Member States of the European Union.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – Mr President, the ECR Group fully supports Iceland's eventual accession to the EU. Iceland is a small, stable and wealthy democracy and a founder member of NATO and the Council of Europe. It has also made good progress in the accession process. I welcome the fact that Iceland's Supreme Court has recognised its EEA/EFTA obligations and the jurisdiction of that court regarding compensation for Icesave depositors, which will no doubt come up during the accession negotiations. I understand around one third of the recognised priority claims have now been repaid.

Given Iceland's successful completion of the IMF's economic recovery programme last year, and a return to positive economic growth, we have no doubt that the other outstanding claims will be repaid.

With regard to the ongoing mackerel dispute, we believe that Iceland must respect its legal obligations and we believe the EU and Iceland to be perfectly capable of engaging in constructive negotiations to resolve this thorny issue. Hopefully, we will also see the radical Commissioner Damanaki reforms of the CFP kick in shortly. Ultimately, if, after closing all the chapters, the Icelandic people in a referendum decide to join the EU, this country will be a model EU Member State and will hopefully entice Norway to join the EU as EFTA would no longer be sustainable without Iceland.

Helmut Scholz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Füle, my group has been following the developments in Iceland over the last few years and the ongoing and intensive accession negotiations with great attention and sympathy. We see Iceland primarily from the perspective of a country with a very small population which has not only succeeded in bringing about social change in recent years, but has also drawn conclusions about how to resolve the causes of the crisis and taken the necessary measures.

We believe that Iceland is very much on the right track. Therefore, my group is also asking itself whether Iceland can bring its experiences, for example, in the area of sustainable energy policy, into the accession process and ultimately into Europe. Some of the solutions it has put in place go far beyond the measures taken to overcome the crisis in the EU. That is what the accession negotiations are essentially about. This presupposes that the negotiations are not only transparent and constructive, but are also on an equal footing as far as their content is concerned and do not have a predetermined outcome.

Some of my fellow Members would like to believe that the domestic political situation in Iceland and the accession process are not efficient in political terms. However, the key political consideration is something quite different. The population of Iceland, which, by the way, is very pro-European, because many Icelanders have studied and worked in Europe, has high expectations of the negotiations. Nevertheless, the people of Iceland do not want accession at any price. In the end, they have to weigh up the results. This is a highly democratic process which we should welcome and support.

I would like to thank Mr Preda for his very balanced report, but on the basis of these considerations, my group will be abstaining from voting. Why is this? Against the background of what I have said, the report contains points that we cannot support. Two examples of these are that if we accept, as my group does, that the accession process will remain open until the final evaluation of the results of the negotiations, we cannot behave now as if the decision had already been made.

Secondly, the report calls in paragraph 5 for a reduction in the state's influence on the banking sector. However, Iceland had particular challenges to overcome in this area, which we must not ignore. Instead, we must assess what has been done and make use of the findings.

Mike Natrass (NI). - Mr President, between 1958 and 1976, Iceland fought the cod wars with Britain. Now, cod stocks are rising because of Icelandic fish management.

Compare that with the former UK fishing grounds, now in EU hands. Lost and ruined. The UK's European dream turned into a nightmare. Established fishing communities die when the EU boats move in.

My message to Iceland is obvious. If you join, you will lose your fish, your freedom and your currency and there is no regard for quotas or regulations in the EU. For the love of cod, do not do this. Say no.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE). - Mr President, Iceland is a small country but of great importance. It has contributed to forming our understanding of democracy and of the safeguarding of citizens' rights. There is, in the Nordic area, a mythical character to its democratic tradition that is based on reality.

I think it is important to look at and discuss the details in the negotiations, but also to see the bigger perspective. A European Union reaching from Iceland to Cyprus will not only be a better Union but also a stronger Union. Stronger in the Nordic area, stronger in the Arctic area, but also stronger in the sense that is proving, as Iceland has demonstrated, that you can deal with economic crisis as a modern market economy and you can deal with all the future challenges.

And I think it is important that we secure an agreement with Iceland that can get the full support of the Icelandic people.

Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE). - (GA) Mr President, I welcome the progress made so far in the negotiations between Iceland and the Union. It is an example of the good relationship between the two sides that 11 chapters have been opened and two closed conditionally. I strongly believe that Iceland's accession to the Union will benefit the Union and Iceland. At the end of the day, it will be a decision for the people of Iceland.

The European Parliament has created strong relations with members of the Althingi. As leader of the European Parliament delegation to Reykjavik, I will be travelling there at the start of next month to attend a Joint Parliamentary Committee meeting. I have tabled a joint amendment with the rapporteur, Mr Preda, and with Mr Färm in a motion on today's report. Of course, it is a cause of sadness that the coastal states have failed to come to a compromise on the division of mackerel and, at the end of the day, the future of the stock is in danger and we must do our best to bring these people back together, and, of course, the Commission is bringing in new trade measures.

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE). - (ES) Mr President, talking of enlargement encourages optimism. No Member State wishes to leave the Union; on the contrary, there are a number of states who wish to join, Iceland among them. I welcome its desire for integration and the rapid pace of adhesion negotiations.

I say adhesion because that is what it is, adhering to and accepting the European Union *acquis*. In the negotiations, efforts are continuing to define the adaptations that the candidate country needs to make to adopt the *acquis* and the timescale for this.

In the Commission's report of October 2011, we were told that as yet, there had been no changes to Icelandic legislation on fisheries, and that it is not in line with the EU *acquis*, nor are the current restrictions on foreign investment in fisheries consistent with the *acquis*: they infringe fundamental principles, like the right of establishment and the free movement of capital and services.

Iceland is a major fishing nation, like my own country, Spain and my region, the Autonomous Community of Galicia. Iceland's accession will strengthen the fisheries sector within the Union, but, Mr President, it cannot remain outside EU law in this sector. I am asking the Commission to pay the closest attention to this issue.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). - Mr President, first of all, I would like to congratulate Mr Preda for his very good but also realistic report. The 2011 enlargement report on Iceland clearly demonstrates Iceland's advanced level of preparation. The closure of eight negotiation chapters is most welcome, but the challenging negotiations are yet to come, and I mean here chapters such as fisheries and agriculture, which will need special attention given that circumstances in Iceland are different from those of other European countries.

Greater importance should also be given to negotiations on chapters such as regional policy, the environment and economic and monetary policy. I saw that according to the recent poll, the majority of Icelanders still oppose EU membership, since 67% are against and only 33% in favour of accession, but my remark is that in the last year, support for the EU in both candidate and Member States has been very low, and therefore Iceland should continue to remain committed to the conclusion of the accession talks.

Robert Atkins (ECR). - Mr President, many of us are ready to welcome Iceland into the European Union, but we have serious reservations about negotiating with a candidate country which is determined to continue in its predation upon the northern European mackerel stocks whilst discussing aspects of the common fisheries policy which it wants to be changed. They are not alone in that.

Iceland has the oldest parliament in the world and we have much in common, but the government and people of Iceland must understand that their intransigence on fisheries and agriculture will require a spirit of flexibility and understanding to overcome this. The British people wish them well in their application.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). - Mr President, if the British Parliament is the mother of parliaments, then the Icelandic Althing is the grandmother of parliaments. With this democratic pedigree, is it really going to give away its independence and its parliamentary democracy to the undemocratic EU, in which the unelected Commission has a monopoly of legislative initiative?

The report, in its patronising way, commends Iceland for its record on human rights. What should Iceland make of such a commendation from an EU with Member States that ban political parties and lock people up for heretical opinions and that has a Commissioner who salivates at the prospect of locking up a well-known Dutch politician?

In the early 1970s, some thought that it was Britain's irresistible charm and charisma that attracted the EEC. I am afraid not: it was our fish, and that explains Iceland's popularity too.

All new members are eventually expected to join the euro. Iceland emerged from its crisis by devaluation three years ago, a choice that is not available for a member of the euro area.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). - (DE) Mr President, I am pleased that we have succeeded in taking the discussions with Iceland in a very positive direction. We have made significant progress and have identified joint opportunities for the future, in particular, in the field of energy. Geothermal energy, which I believe is more widespread in Iceland than anywhere else in the world, has excellent export potential and will therefore bring a great deal of revenue into the country. However, Iceland is also heavily involved in tidal power plants and in osmotic power plants, in which electricity is generated from the chemical reaction that takes place when freshwater from a river meets the saltwater in the sea. Iceland is in the

position to develop a completely new industry and a promising future for itself. I believe that we have important joint opportunities in this area to create new prosperity for Iceland.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, today's discussion clearly demonstrates that Iceland is well engaged in the accession process and that continued commitment on all sides should ensure that negotiations can proceed effectively.

As I mentioned, this year will be a decisive year as we are reaching the stage where the real negotiations start. The Commission will exert all efforts to allow the discussions to start as soon as possible on as many chapters as possible, including on the core chapters. In those discussions, we are ready to take into account Iceland's specificities and expectations, while fully safeguarding the principles of the Union and the requirements of the negotiating framework. I remain confident that, with joint and determined efforts, we will be able to find a win-win solution to overcome the challenges ahead.

I would like to offer my appreciation to the Members of this esteemed House for their continuing support for the ongoing accession process with Iceland.

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (DA) Mr President, Commissioner Füle, honourable Members, on behalf of the Presidency, I would like to thank you for an excellent and constructive debate in respect of Iceland and the negotiations.

I would like to make it very clear that the Danish Presidency, together with the Commission, will do everything it can to take the negotiations as far forward as possible. We are also working closely with the forthcoming Cyprus Presidency in this regard.

There is no doubt that Iceland has come a long way. Not only will Iceland be able to offer a great deal to the EU, the EU will also be able to offer a great deal to Iceland, and therefore we must now apply all our efforts jointly to get as many chapters opened and closed as possible. We are very well aware that there are difficult challenges ahead with regard to fisheries, but that is a task that we need to seek to fulfil together. The Danish Presidency will do everything in its power to support this process, and we also very much welcome the negotiations between the Commission and Iceland.

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

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Zuzana Brzobohatá (S&D), *in writing*. – (CS) I welcome the developments in Iceland over recent months, particularly with the economic reforms for overcoming the economic crisis, the enhanced internal protection of human rights, anti-corruption measures and the harmonisation of Icelandic legislation with European legislation. Although I am aware that talks on some issues, such as the free movement of capital and fisheries policy, will raise a fresh set of problems, I believe that Iceland has taken a decisive step towards future EU membership. We should not forget, of course, that the final decision will not rest with lawyers or politicians, but with the citizens themselves in a referendum.

Ivari Padar (S&D), *in writing*. – (ET) I would like to thank the rapporteur for the balanced text of this resolution! As a Northern European, I am naturally very glad to support Iceland's accession to the European Union. Iceland is a Nordic country that has long cultural and historic ties with Europe. From my point of view as an Estonian, the small country of Iceland is another good example of a courageous and forward-looking country that stands up for democratic principles. Iceland was also the first country in the world to recognise the restoration of the independence of the Republic of Estonia, for which we are thankful. Of course, the people of Iceland must reach consensus regarding accession. I wish them luck and strength for that task.

7. Enlargement report for Bosnia and Herzegovina (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the enlargement report for Bosnia and Herzegovina [2011/2888(RSP)].

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, our third debate this morning concerns Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am happy to be able to give you a more positive assessment of the situation than that given in last autumn's progress report and reflected in the Council's conclusions of December 2011. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Doris Pack for her work on this issue.

Important developments have taken place since then, and we have reason to be cautiously optimistic. We expect the newly established Council of Ministers to deliver on a range of issues – economic as well as political – in an effort to ensure the proper functioning of the state and to enhance the European integration agenda. Let me briefly mention some of them.

The most pressing need now is for agreement to be reached on a state budget for 2012 and for it to be adopted. Institutions that have a role in EU integration should be properly financed, and specific policies also need to be funded. A global fiscal framework for 2012-2014 must also be developed to ensure sound fiscal management. Crucially, EUR 100 million of macro-financial assistance from the Commission cannot be released until this framework and an agreement with the International Monetary Fund are in place.

In its conclusions of last December, the Council urged all political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to live up to their responsibilities and to develop a shared vision of the future of their country. It has therefore been encouraging to see the different steps taken by the political actors since then in an effort to progress towards the EU. In particular, the recent adoption of the law on State aid and the law on the population census moved Bosnia and Herzegovina in the right direction.

However, a very important step on the path to European integration remains. This concerns the need for Bosnia and Herzegovina to make credible efforts to bring its constitution into full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights in line with the Sejdić-Finci ruling. The Bosnian authorities must address this urgently. Improving and strengthening the efficient functioning of the state and its institutions is essential, including through the necessary constitutional changes. The European Union will need to see credible effort made in this regard for Bosnia and Herzegovina's stabilisation and association agreement to enter into force.

Finally, I want to take the opportunity to underline that establishing an effective coordination mechanism for dealing with EU matters is crucial. Bosnia and Herzegovina

will need to be in a position to adopt, implement and enforce EU laws and rules in a more efficient manner than has been the case so far.

From my intervention this morning, it is clear that much remains to be done in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Certain developments have been encouraging, and that is very welcome. We will, however, continue to encourage and assist Bosnia and Herzegovina in delivering on the important political and economic reforms which are needed. I know that we can count on the support of this Parliament in this regard. We in the Danish Presidency are also very much looking forward to our continued cooperation with the Commission on these matters.

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, let me first of all thank Doris Pack for an excellent report on Bosnia and Herzegovina as the basis for discussion with all of you today.

When speaking to this House about Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is difficult to be overly positive: there is light but there is also shadow. As your resolution points out, in the past year as a whole, progress has been limited. I therefore want to join you in reminding all political actors in the country of the road map towards European Union integration. In the face of last year's political stalemate, the European Union has consistently maintained this road map and demonstrated its commitment in a variety of ways.

Firstly, the European Union has prolonged the mandate of the EUFOR Althea mission, with a new focus on capacity-building and training the armed forces of the country. This mission now confirms on a regular basis that there is no threat to the safe and secure environment.

Secondly, in light of improvements in law enforcement, we have also been able to decide on terminating the European Union Police Mission in June this year. However, follow-up will be ensured by a technical assistance mission on the ground.

Thirdly, citizens continue to enjoy travelling to the Schengen area without visas, while implementation of the agreement is closely monitored. This demonstrates to the citizens that the European Union perspective is real and tangible.

Fourthly, the European Union has enhanced its presence in Sarajevo by appointing Peter Sørensen in a double-hatted capacity as Head of Delegation, and as European Union Special Representative. The delegation has strengthened outreach and diplomatic activities.

These efforts start to show results. The European Union perspective has finally begun to dominate the political agenda. A series of joint initiatives have been launched in areas ranging from the Structured Dialogue on Justice to the fiscal and budgetary framework and on infrastructure development in transport and energy. The recent developments show that this determination has been rewarded.

After a year of stagnation, there is now a new positive momentum on the European Union agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A State aid law and a law on the population census were adopted and a new state-level government has taken up work in February. The new Chair of the Council of Ministers, Mr Bevanda, whom I met last week, has put European Union integration at the forefront of his government programme.

The first indications are that Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to take great strides towards becoming a member of the European Union. This, in turn, bodes well for the steps that we can undertake once the country fulfils all the necessary conditions.

One of the many important points which you mention in your resolution is the necessary constitutional changes needed to be undertaken in order to enable the entry into force of the stabilisation and association agreement. The European Union needs to see a 'credible effort' with regard to the implementation of the Sejdić-Finci ruling to bring the constitution into compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights.

We are in close consultation with your neighbours across the river, the Council of Europe, on what this entails exactly. Decisive movement by Bosnia and Herzegovina here could unlock many new fruitful avenues for our cooperation.

Overall, 2012 will be a crucial year for the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the path towards the European Union. The Commission wholeheartedly supports this endeavour and – as I understand – so does this House.

Doris Pack, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, in six weeks, more has happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina than we had expected to occur in 15 months. I would like to congratulate everyone who has taken this route. I hope that the country's political leaders have understood that they are losing their links to Europe and that they should not constantly become involved in ethnically motivated disputes.

My report has 59 paragraphs, but, unfortunately, I can only mention a few of them. Most of them have already been covered by the two previous speakers. I would like to highlight the fact that the amendment to the constitution following the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the Sejdić-Finci ruling is absolutely essential. We need to see progress being made in the judicial system and, in particular, in the structured dialogue. We urgently need a national budget. It is also important that the necessary institutions are set up to enable the European Union to enter into negotiations with the country. The fight against corruption must produce some real results and an internal market must be created in Bosnia and Herzegovina which will be in the interests both of workers and of investors. The process of reorganising the education system must be speeded up and we also want to see an end to two schools under one roof. The veterinary profession and the food supply chain must be restructured to comply with EU requirements, particularly given that the neighbouring country of Croatia is joining the EU.

We need to investigate whether the office of the High Representative should be closed down in the near future against the background of the recent positive developments, in order to give more responsibility to local politicians.

We welcome the significant commitment shown by the EU ambassador, who has put a great deal of hard work into this country. We also suggest that he is given more resources locally to support his activities. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only country in the region which has not granted right of entry to the citizens of Kosovo. There are many Bosnians living in Kosovo who have family in Bosnia and Herzegovina and who would like to return, at least for a visit. I am expecting this issue to be resolved soon. I hope that Bosnia and Herzegovina can at least bring its stabilisation and association agreement (SAA) status to an end this year and perhaps even submit its accession application.

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

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD), *Blue-card question.* – Ms Pack, do you think that it is a good thing for the nation states of Europe for Bosnia and Herzegovina to join the euro, because that is what is required under the Treaty if Bosnia and Herzegovina

should, in fact, become a Member of the European Union, which is what you seem to be in favour of?

Doris Pack (PPE), *Blue-card answer.* – (DE) Mr President, Mr Dartmouth, I do not know why you are looking so far ahead. First, the country has to be prepared for accession and then it will join the EU. After that, it has to meet the criteria and when it shows that it can meet them, it can join the euro area too. We will welcome this, but it will not happen tomorrow or even the day after, and you know that as well as I do. You are familiar with the timeframes. Furthermore, the country's currency is the convertible mark, which means that it is very close to the euro. You do not need to worry about it. You may not be joining the euro, but Bosnia and Herzegovina definitely will when it has achieved its goal.

Emine Bozkurt, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – Mr President, there is progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the new government, the State Aid Law and the Census Law. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to find a durable solution for refugees and implement Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement. The main and last step necessary to comply with the conditions of the SAA (stabilisation and association agreement) is implementing the Sejdić-Finci ruling. The parliamentary committee working on this failed to come up with concrete results – that is regrettable.

If you are already late for the train, small steps to catch that train will not help, especially if that train is already moving. We want Bosnia and Herzegovina to jump in, but quick and well considered reforms are needed. If Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to apply for candidate status in June, the leaders need to deliver to us and, most of all, to their own citizens. The desire of the Bosnia and Herzegovinian people to join the EU crosses all national, ethnic and religious lines and the young people need perspective, and an EU one.

A better coordination mechanism and the country speaking with one voice to the EU are necessary, so is political will and leaders to talk about what binds rather than what divides the country. Divisive nationalism and extremism can divide a country, especially in a fragile region with a fresh war history such as the Western Balkans. All forms of extremism must be condemned and addressed in the region as a whole.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with many faces, but it is definitely not one of Wahhabites. Therefore, the only reference in the report to Wahhabites is far from reflecting the reality and this reference should disappear. For reconciliation, justice is necessary. The obstruction of justice and the denial of history and of genocide is taking the country backwards not forward. People should also be free to choose whether they want to see a movie or not. Banning the movie of Angelina Jolie is a wrong message for freedom of thought and expression, crucial in any democracy.

Sarah Ludford, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – Mr President, Ms Pack's report observes that the lack of job perspectives, especially among young people, is hindering the progress of the country and contributing to social discontent. One of the reasons I was so pleased to push hard in support of Ms Fajon on visa-free travel for Bosnians 18 months ago – with which we succeeded – was to allow travel for study and business in the hope of an economic boost, as well as widened horizons.

Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot prosper economically or otherwise, or find its future in the EU, without a functional state that can take decisions. Progress has been made, as Mr Wammen and Ms Pack and Commissioner Füle have said – formation of the government, adoption of State aid and census laws, for instance – but, as Mr Wammen said, without a

budget, BiH cannot get EU aid. Without tackling crime and corruption and having an independent judiciary, business will not invest. Being an epicentre of trafficking in human beings is a huge shame for the country.

There needs to be local ownership of reforms, but international support and guidance – especially from the EU – is still highly relevant. That is why the ALDE Group is backing the amendment from the S&D Group reintroducing the explicit mention of the ‘5+2 Agenda’ as a basis for closing the OHR, and that is also why ALDE has retabled its amendment calling for the EU to sponsor a constitutional conference in cooperation with the Council of Europe across the road, which has great expertise in its Venice Commission. Thank you again to Ms Pack for a very good report.

Marije Cornelissen, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, religious extremism, like all extremism, is deplorable. A group that refuses to allow women in political posts, wants to base legislation and justice on a religious book and discriminates against other religions, and whose followers put their children in medical danger, should have no place in political institutions. I am, of course, speaking of the Netherlands here, where the party of Mr Belder does all these things out of Christian religious extremism. Aside from the luckily very limited group of voters for his party, most other Christians in the Netherlands are very, very moderate.

In the same vein, almost all Muslims in BiH are very, very moderate, and, in the same vein, it would be as disproportionate to adopt a resolution here that warns of the threat of Wahhabism in BiH as it would be to adopt a resolution on Christian extremism in the Netherlands. We will, of course, adopt a text on the Netherlands tomorrow, but without mention of this.

There is undoubtedly extremism in BiH, as there is in the rest of the Balkans. Let us warn of all extremisms that are intolerant and discriminatory. I, for one, have, up to now, been attacked by nationalist, Orthodox and Catholic extremists at the diverse Gay Prides I have been at, not yet by Wahhabis up to now. I hope you will support us in taking out the specific mention of Wahhabism in the report and let us worry about extremism in general. Otherwise, it is a brilliant report and if this is taken out, we will happily vote in favour.

Oldřich Vlasák, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (CS) Mr President, the European Conservatives and Reformists Group wholeheartedly welcomed the expansion package from October last year. We fully support the regulation and the recommendations of the Commission. We are fully behind the expansion and we believe that a further acceleration in the talks with Croatia and its accession in 2013 will provide a very good incentive and a model for other countries in the Western Balkans, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. This does not mean, however, that the process of further expansion will be problem-free. The statement on the lack of reform progress by Bosnia and Herzegovina in some areas is, in our opinion, an objective evaluation of the current situation in this country. In addition to better cooperation at all levels, there is a particular need to strengthen the judicial system and establish rules for the fight against corruption. Above and beyond this point, I would like to emphasise that we fully support the rapid entry of, and negotiations with, Iceland, and I have personally long stressed the strategic importance of full EU membership for Turkey.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Mr President, according to paragraph 27 of the resolution, the European Parliament is concerned about Wahhabi extremism in

the Western Balkans. The statement of this fact gives me immediate reason to put a couple of questions to Commissioner Füle.

Does the Commission share this concern about the Wahhabi events in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and, if so, what is the Commission doing to combat Wahhabi extremism in BiH?

In paragraph 27, praise is given to the Grand Mufti of Bosnia for his stance against terrorism and violence. Prominent Bosnian artists and human rights defenders, such as Refik Hodžić and Feđa Štukan, on the other hand, argue that Grand Mufti Cerić is himself personally responsible for fuelling ethnic distrust and for blatant hate speech, including issuing threats against 'the infidels'.

I would like to hear from the Commissioner exactly what Brussels's current assessment is of the Mufti's social role and contribution, respectively?

Ewald Stadler (NI). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, firstly, I am of the opinion that we should definitely refer to Wahhabism and the risk of Islamic fundamentalism in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the report and, in this respect, I agree with the rapporteur.

The speeches by the rapporteur, Ms Pack, and by Mr Wammen make the disappointment about the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina very clear. I believe we must take an objective view of the fact that the country simply does not have the will to form a single cohesive state. It also does not have the will to establish a joint Bosnian and Herzegovinian identity.

The ethnic groups continue to have a sceptical or even a hostile attitude to one another. Therefore, I must advise against taking a falsely romantic view of the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, we should not cling desperately to the concept of a single unified state. Given the constitutional development of this country, we should also consider the possible alternatives, such as a loose federation, which may be capable of surviving, or breaking the country up into cantons, so that we at least have one contact. This country is very far from being ready to join the Union. Candidate status will not be within its reach for a long time.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, next year, the European Union will have a border with Bosnia and Herzegovina and this year is the 20th anniversary of the outbreak of war there which was instigated by Belgrade. We must be aware of the fact that it is time that genuine reforms were implemented. The EU Special Representatives, Mr Inzko and Mr Sørensen, have both done an excellent job and both deserve our support. However, as Ms Pack rightly said, the initiative must come from the country itself. This is why we need to educate a new young generation of leaders from all three nationalities, strengthen the system of local authorities and make the education system more European, including the establishment of a European university.

State reform is urgently needed to transform this country into a symmetrical federation of three different peoples. All of this may be very difficult to achieve, but I do not believe that we can risk the collapse of Bosnia and Herzegovina. If this were to happen, the central Bosnian Croats, who are never referred to and who live in very isolated communities, and the Muslims would be the losers. However, even the supposed winners, Republika Srpska and Herzegovina, would also lose. It would be a disaster for everyone.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). - Mr President, the UK is not a particularly rich country. Nevertheless, income per head in the United Kingdom is eight times that in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a problem: how it will be met is by massive subsidies from the British taxpayer and the other EU taxpayers. In fact, the gravy train of EU subsidies has started already. In the last ten years, Bosnia and Herzegovina – not an EU member, not yet even a candidate – has received EUR 1.6 billion in assorted subsidies. There will be more to pay if it becomes a candidate and much, much more if, in fact, Bosnia and Herzegovina does become a member of the EU.

On the evidence of this debate, nobody is properly counting the cost. The idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina being a member of the EU is a complete non-starter, on financial grounds alone, and I urge you all to forget it.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE). – (SV) Mr President, if Bosnia is to succeed, the EU must also do its part. We must help Bosnia to strengthen the state's coordination mechanisms. It also needs to be clear that it is the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina that is responsible for this work. When the EU representatives approach Bosnia, it should be the Council of Ministers to which they turn.

We have been discussing Bosnia for so many years, and both Bosnia and the EU have had political goals and ambitions. This year, however, there is new hope, a kind of positive momentum provided by Prime Minister Bevan's statement that his highest priority will be Bosnia's EU perspective and that the country should apply for candidate status as soon as possible. This inspires a great deal of hope. We absolutely must support this goal.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Jan Kozłowski (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, firstly, I would like to offer my sincere compliments to Doris Pack on a very good and balanced report. I welcome the fact that a new government has been formed in Bosnia and Herzegovina; I believe that this represents an opportunity to accelerate the reforms mentioned by previous speakers and also to make further progress on integration with the European Union.

I think that questions of education and employment policy, crucial for the growth and development of the country in socio-economic terms, should be at the centre of the government's attention. Reforms in the education system should aim to make the provision of education better adapted to the demands of the labour market, and thus to increase employability, particularly among young people. This objective should also be furthered by the use of European educational programmes which support youth mobility, as well as by action to achieve mutual recognition of qualifications in the region. These are questions which could be taken up by the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training.

Zita Gurmai (S&D). - Mr President, may I thank, among others, Doris Pack, for her great report.

First, let me underline that I firmly believe in the European future and prospects of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with its Western Balkan neighbours. I also welcome the recent appointment of Mr Bevan as Prime Minister, which puts an end to 15 months of political crisis. However, though progress has been made, much remains to be done regarding fundamental reforms with a view to EU integration.

I would like to insist here on the human and social rights issues. Though human rights and protection of minorities are broadly ensured, constitutional changes still have to be made regarding compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the effective implementation of major human rights conventions. Moreover, though state-level anti-discrimination legislation has been put in place, its implementation remains very weak, particularly with regard to the protection of women against violence and the social protection of children.

Finally, I would like to highlight my concerns regarding the number of divided schools and mono-ethnic schools. I know that the scars of the past take time to heal, but I believe that much progress needs to be made in terms of inter-ethnic relations.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). - Mr President, now that Serbia has been granted candidate status and neighbouring Croatia will join the EU next year, Bosnia and Herzegovina leaders should at last put an end to their internal conflicts along national lines. They need to reach a consensus on constitutional changes and strengthen state-level institutions so that they are capable of carrying out EU-related reforms and, eventually, accession negotiations. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs a proper government, not a council of ministers.

Some of the outstanding issues are the property of the Bosnia and Herzegovina military and the need to follow up the ECHR ruling on the Sejdić-Finci case. The newly-elected council of ministers is doing a good job by dealing with the burning economic issues and moving away from nationalistic discourse. Unemployment and a balanced budget are the real issues that Vjekoslav Bevanda, the Chair of the Council of Ministers (not a Prime Minister), is right to deal with.

Lastly, I would add that Bosnia and Herzegovina needs at least one new ministry at state level, a Ministry of Agriculture. Agriculture is one of the most important topics of the negotiations, and Bosnia needs to have adequate institutions to deal with this topic.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). - (SK) Mr President, the sensitive and constructive policy of the European Union on the Balkans is also producing results in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Croatia's accession to the European Union and the opening of accession negotiations with Serbia is certainly having a stimulating effect on the political situation in this country as well. The influence of the EU in this country should still, I think, be focused on stabilising local democracy and calming or combating ethnic tensions.

The motivation of the European perspective for the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as its political leaders, can be a significant incentive for the implementation of the necessary reforms to the political system and the public administration institutions. We need be under no illusion that the road taken by Bosnia and Herzegovina towards a European political culture will be simple. We must be patient and we should be able to appreciate every positive change that occurs in this country.

Franz Obermayr (NI). - (DE) Mr President, unfortunately, there is a significant difference between wishes and reality in Bosnia. It is understandable that the young people want to join the EU, despite all the obstacles, but in reality, things look very different.

In economic terms, the country has hit rock bottom. The ethnic groups have a more than sceptical attitude to one another. The administration is inefficient and, most importantly for me, Islamic fundamentalism is a problem. Even if many of the ladies and gentlemen here in the Chamber do not want to believe this, it is even reaching as far as the primary schools in Austria and we really should not underestimate it.

A state must fulfil its duties in order to be accepted and recognised as a state. I believe that rushing to join the EU is the wrong thing to do.

I would like to make one more comment on Christian extremism, which has already been mentioned by one of the previous speakers. Christian extremism may not be particularly cool, but, unlike the Salafists, the Wahhabists and Sharia law, I do not believe that it represents a threat to Western culture, the European culture of the European Union.

President. – Thank you very much, Mr Obermayr. It is not my job as President to discuss the content of speeches. However, as the Vice-President responsible for issues of extremism, I would like to make it clear that any form of extremism is harmful to society.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I believe that it is necessary for me to clarify the situation. When I talk about extremism in inverted commas, I do not mean what we generally understand by violent extremism. Instead, as previous speakers have already said, I am referring to Christian extremism. When a religion calls on us to love our neighbours, and that is how I understand it, I cannot envisage it including the form of extremism which you rightly disapprove of and which I am also opposed to.

Boris Zala (S&D). – Mr President, most of us would like to see Bosnia and Herzegovina developing strong and effective institutions at state level.

It is obvious that without a functioning state, no country can cope with the demands of European integration. But there is a real risk here that we, the EU, can overshoot it. If we push too hard for central institutions, our efforts might backfire. It will stoke precisely those centrifugal and nationalist dynamics that we want to prevent, because in the end, for any state to function, it requires democratic legitimacy and that cannot be imposed by outsiders.

Let me be clear: European integration can indeed transform the politics and economics of candidate countries as it has done in my country, but it cannot construct democratic legitimacy of states and their institutions. Only its citizens and its political elites can.

Of course, Bosnia and Herzegovina can only join the EU as a single state, but it needs to be a single state that its citizens and politicians from the three entities will agree upon amongst themselves.

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE). – (SL) Mr President, we have an excellent report before us, thanks to the long-standing efforts and knowledge of our rapporteur, Doris Pack.

The report addresses and supports the European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina – the only legitimate approach. I would like to join those Members who believe the reference to the Wahhabis as a threat in Bosnia and Herzegovina is completely unnecessary. In fact, this is misleading and somewhat casts suspicion on what Bosnia and Herzegovina stands for, which has always been cultural, religious and ethnic diversity.

I would like to finish by saying that it is essential that the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina is allowed, as far as possible, to decide its own fate, including the country's constitutional arrangements. In doing so, the Dayton Agreement, which brought an end to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, cannot be the only taboo subject.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, so yet another part of the former Yugoslavian federation is to give up its independence to a new federation, the EU. The federation is dead; long live the federation.

Is Bosnia's embracing of the free movement of people going to extend to the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or simply to the rest of the EU? Many Bosnians will regard the EU as an attractive escape route from the fragmented and still dangerous Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the point of view of the EU's existing members, Bosnia will be yet another net recipient of EU funds and, of course, an opportunity for the rest of us to import some of their interesting and enriching ethnic friction, just in case we have not got enough of that already.

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

Bernd Posselt (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – Mr President, Mr Brons, I would just like to ask you whether a) you know that Yugoslavia was a Communist dictatorship and that the EU is a democratic community and b) you are aware that it is possible to leave the EU. We are looking forward to Bosnia and Herzegovina joining the EU. When will you take the initiative and encourage your country to leave? Then we will know whether or not the people of your country are really in favour of membership.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI), *Blue-card answer.* – I will answer the last part first. I have been continuously asking my country to leave so at least we are in agreement on that, Mr Posselt. Your mention of Yugoslavia being a Communist dictatorship is absolutely right and therefore, some might say that it is appropriate that it should join the EU, another dictatorship.

Norica Nicolai (ALDE). - Mr President, I want to welcome the report by Doris Pack. It is realistic and balanced, but it is difficult to accept paragraph 27 of the report because it is not – shall I say – ‘politically correct’ to label an entire community as extremist.

I believe for all of us, Bosnia and Herzegovina is important because we must avoid the failure of a state. The crucial issue for this state is to make the appropriate constitutional reforms to benefit the entire community, because it is multicultural and multi-ethnic. How we deal with this community depends on us, and for this reason we must back increased EU support for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Another issue that I want to tackle is the question of impunity. All of us know that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there have been a lot of war crimes in the form of rape, but impunity still exists. I would like to welcome the current measures, but I consider they are not enough for a realistic approach.

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

Ewald Stadler (NI), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr President, Ms Nicolai, you and one of the other Members in your group have repeatedly said that Wahhabi extremism should not be mentioned in the report. Are you and your colleague really of the opinion that we should keep quiet about this extremism? Do you believe, despite the liberal Muslim tradition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that we really should say nothing about the influence of Saudi Arabia and the Wahhabi extremists who are putting a lot of money into the country? Do you really think that extremism will go away if we do not talk about it? I believe that it puts at risk the European values which you always swear by and, therefore, it seems important to me to mention this extremism.

Norica Nicolai (ALDE), *Blue-card answer.* – (RO) Mr President, if something is mentioned in a report, it never disappears. Extremism is a threat, but it is by no means a European approach to consider whole communities extremist, so long as only some of their

representatives act in this way. Certainly, Saudi Arabia supports the Wahhabi community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but I hope this situation is not generated by an extremist approach on the part of this state.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Štefan Füle, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, honourable Members, it has been a very useful debate indeed and many important aspects have been mentioned.

If I come back to the honourable Member Belder's question, let me say the following: while continuing to denounce and reject all forms of extremism, the Commission is not commenting on specific religious orientation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. You will not find that in our last progress report.

There are many statements from religious leaders, from all sides on an almost daily basis, and we urge restraint and a spirit of cooperation and reconciliation from all responsible religious and political leaders.

Let me also highlight some other important issues which have been voiced in your debate. As also raised in your draft resolution, it is important that the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina carry out necessary technical preparations for a population census as a matter of urgency. The Commission is ready to give technical support for this and to be actively involved in the census so essential for the socio-economic development.

Your resolution also highlights the urgent need for all levels of authorities to strengthen coordination in all sectors relevant for the transposition of European Union legislation and for financial cooperation. It is evident that in this area, Bosnia and Herzegovina need to undertake substantial efforts.

The debate overall has shown that a large majority of colleagues here share our views. We are united in our joint commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina's European future and we are clear in what we expect from the country in the next months in order to move forward and make up for lost time.

It will not be easy with the election campaign starting very soon for the local elections in October. There will be many challenges ahead and we need to make sure that the politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina are ready to take up a greater part of the ownership of the process.

It is time for Bosnia and Herzegovina to catch up with its neighbours. What we need more than anything else for this is a positive spirit towards compromise. All of us should thus encourage politicians in the country to make compromises in the European spirit, to leave the past behind, and to move the country towards its European future.

Nicolai Wammen, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (DA) Mr President, Commissioner Füle, honourable Members, the EU has given the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina the hope of a future within the family. It is therefore gratifying that a new government has now been formed there and that the political leaders are taking joint responsibility for the country's development.

There are signs that the new government will take a series of initiatives, economic as well as political, in order to be able to bring about progress for the country's citizens and promote integration in relation to the EU. Thus, there has already been progress in respect of two of the three conditions for the entry into force of a stabilisation and association agreement:

firstly, the adoption of the law on State aid and, secondly, the adoption of the law on the population census. The question of bringing the country's constitution into line with the European Convention on Human Rights is still to be resolved. There can be no doubt that a credible effort in this regard is crucial to the country meeting its obligations.

The next milestone is the entry into force of a stabilisation and association agreement. This will systematise the dialogue between the EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina and make it possible to work in a more targeted way on the reform efforts. It is important to send out the signal that the EU will continue to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina, including via the EU Special Representative, Peter Sørensen, who has done a splendid job which has been much appreciated.

The primary responsibility for pushing things forward lies, of course, with the leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is up to them to show leadership and it is up to them to take the necessary decisions and continue the path of reform so that Bosnia and Herzegovina can also make progress along the path to the EU.

The road to the EU is a long and tough one. It is, and should be, based on hard work and own merit. Croatia's accession to the EU and Serbia's recent candidate status demonstrate that EU orientation is available for those countries that are willing to undertake reforms and take the crucial steps. I hope this will be a source of motivation for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and I wish Parliament, the Commission and the Council well in their work in carrying out the important tasks ahead of us in this regard.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.40 and resumed at 12.05)

Written statements (Rule 149)

Vladko Todorov Panayotov (ALDE), *in writing*. – Along with other Western Balkan countries, Bosnia is currently facing the double challenge of integrating the EU while consolidating the constructions of its nation. Its political, economic, social and structural improvements are unquestionable; this duplicity remains one of the main differences with the 2004 enlargement and could represent an extra burden to achieving the integration. Nevertheless, I believe the EU could make this task easier for the future Member States. In fact, 20 years ago, Europe intended to defend the values of multiculturalism in the Balkan region. Nowadays, it appears that some of the EU's main leaders have stopped believing in these values. If the principle of enlargement itself is not at stake, how can multiculturalism be promoted in the Balkan region when multiculturalism is discarded by the founding countries of the EU? It is not easy to expand when there are doubts at the core, yet it is desirable and pressing for us to set a good example and structure for these future Member States.

IN THE CHAIR: MARTIN SCHULZ

President

8. Statement by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, last night, there was a tragic road accident in Switzerland. A coach from Belgium carrying at least 52 people crashed in a tunnel. As things currently stand, we know that 28 people, 22 of them children, have died.

The Belgian Members of this House and the Belgian people are deeply shocked, as are all of us. We have all seen pictures of the accident on television.

On behalf of Parliament, I would like to convey our sympathy to the families of the victims and to everyone affected by this tragedy.

I have already expressed our condolences to the King of Belgium and the Belgian Government, represented by Prime Minister Di Rupo.

Every one of us here in this House, whether we have children of our own or can remember our relationship with our parents, will certainly understand what it means to send your children off on holiday and have them return in a coffin. Therefore, I believe that our condolences, which do not just consist of empty words, but which express our genuine sympathy, should go to the parents.

I would like to ask you to observe a minute's silence in memory of the victims and their families.

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

IN THE CHAIR: GIANNI PITTELLA

Vice-President

9. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

9.1. European Fisheries Fund (A7-0447/2011 - João Ferreira) (vote)

9.2. Autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef (A7-0025/2012 - Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl) (vote)

9.3. Common commercial policy (A7-0028/2012 - Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl) (vote)

9.4. General guidelines for the 2013 budget: Section III - Commission (A7-0040/2012 - Giovanni La Via) (vote)

– *Before the vote on Amendment 25:*

Anni Podimata (S&D). - Mr President, I would like to ask you at voting time, in the languages that have the masculine and the feminine, to use both to show respect for female colleagues.

(Applause)

– *After the final vote:*

Francesco Enrico Speroni (EFD). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I suggest that without getting weighed down in overblown formalities, you simply ask 'Have you voted?', in order to save time.

President. – Please, do not disturb the vote, which is proceeding very smoothly and calmly. Please, that is enough now.

9.5. Mandate of the special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering (B7-0151/2012) (vote)

– *After the vote:*

Rosario Crocetta (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that today is a great result for Parliament, because when I wrote to President Buzek on 15 July saying that ‘we need to set up an anti-mafia committee’, I remember many Members from different countries saying, ‘But the mafia is only a problem in Sicily and in Italy’.

Today, recognition by our fellow Members from the north and from the whole of Europe that there is a problem of ‘organised crime in Europe’, and the desire to fight it together is, I believe, a momentous fact, and I would like to thank you, Mr President, and Parliament as a whole.

(Applause)

President. – The explanations of vote are next. If we have a debate afterwards, I have to allow everyone to speak.

9.6. Judicial training (B7-0150/2012) (vote)

9.7. Child labour in the cocoa sector (B7-0126/2012) (vote)

9.8. International Cocoa Agreement 2010 (A7-0024/2012 - Vital Moreira) (vote)

9.9. Addressing the EU diabetes epidemic (B7-0145/2012) (vote)

9.10. Enlargement report for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (B7-0127/2012) (vote)

9.11. Enlargement report for Iceland (B7-0125/2012) (vote)

9.12. Enlargement report for Bosnia and Herzegovina (B7-0129/2012) (vote)

President. – That concludes the vote.

10. Explanations of vote

President. – The next item is the explanations of vote.

Report: João Ferreira (A7-0447/2011)

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, the fishing industry, although diminished in size in recent years, remains of great importance to my constituents in Wales in terms of its contribution to employment and to the wider economy, which is why I welcome the report on the European Fisheries Fund.

This fund is one of the financial tools at the EU’s disposal that can be used to help contribute to regional development and also deliver the aims of the common fisheries policy, such as ensuring the conservation and sustainability of fish stocks and the long-term viability of the fishing sector. Given the added pressures on national financial resources as a result

of the current economic difficulties, the report sensibly recommends using the European Fisheries Fund to inject funds into the economy to ensure projects can continue.

Fishing in Welsh waters also makes a major contribution to the tourism sector. Particularly in West Wales, therefore, which is in receipt of cohesion funds, we need to ensure that access to this European Fisheries Fund is encouraged by the more needy regions to enhance the prospects of our local fishermen, to protect our maritime parks, and to promote diversification, including boosting tourism across our coastal areas in Wales.

Anna Rosbach (ECR). – (DA) Mr President, granting state support to a particular industry runs fundamentally counter to the free market. The fishing industry must not be dependent on such support. The proposal is a definite improvement on the previous arrangement. It has become easier to redirect resources from the fund to use them for green objectives.

I would have preferred the fund to have been discontinued, but as that is not possible, it is preferable for as many resources as possible to be used to speed up initiatives rather than as direct support for a particular industry. In the long term, I hope that we can eradicate the many support arrangements that, unfortunately, make up the majority of the EU budget. Let us strengthen the free market. That is what is best for taxpayers and for industry.

Iva Zanicchi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, at a time of widespread economic crisis that is also affecting Europe's coastal communities, I think the commitment to make better use of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) is an important one.

Taking into account the fact that appropriations in this area have often been allocated to the scrapping of vessels and therefore have not contributed to the growth of fishing-related activities, I welcome the proposal to review the priorities of the EFF and to encourage easier access to European funds. Despite the fact that the text contained some limitations, I voted for Mr Ferreira's text, which aims to ensure that Member States can continue to implement EFF programmes.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, other Members before me have already said that there is a general situation of crisis that comes on top of years of decline and disintegration in many areas of the economy, including the fishing industry. For some countries like Italy, but also Greece, the fishing industry is an important source of revenue, as well as an added value for many regions falling under the convergence objective.

Therefore, I wished to support the Commission's proposal to allow a top-up of ten percentage points to be applied to the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of the programmes coming under the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), even as a temporary measure, in order to encourage public and private investment and make better use of the funds provided by the EU.

Mario Pirillo (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted in favour of the report on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) because I believe it is necessary and should not be delayed, in order to align EFF expenditure in all the EU countries as a matter of urgency. Therefore, I agree with Mr Ferreira in asking for its application at first reading.

Ms Damanaki did well to propose an urgent measure for countries with little investment capacity, as this has often been reduced to historic lows as the report shows. The debate about the reform of the common fisheries policy has already begun and therefore, EFF expenditure needs to be accelerated also by increasing the cofinancing threshold by 10%,

in order to avoid there being resources from the old programming period still to be spent from the time the new reform applies. It is important to avoid overlapping between the EFF and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

Peter Jahr (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, I was also very pleased to be able to vote in favour of this motion because in my view, it is the right response to the problems that the Member States are currently facing. We all want to stimulate the economy and there are two fundamental problems.

One concerns the fact that the countries cannot come up with the cofinancing funds and the other is that the advance financing of many programmes is simply not working. We are in the process of resolving these problems. The situation with regard to advance financing will improve because the European Union will make the necessary funds available.

I think that we could use this as an example for other funds and I would like us to evaluate the results of this process in order to see whether this mechanism could be applied to other programmes and funds.

Charles Tannock (ECR). - Mr President, I voted alongside my group, the ECR, in favour of the Ferreira report on the European Fisheries Fund. We consider programmes such as the EFF to be useful tools but note that in the Member States that have suffered most in the financial crisis, the implementation of these projects is difficult due to pressures on the budget to cofinance. The report foresees a Commission proposal that would allow increased payments to be made to those countries that are suffering most from the global financial crisis, namely those that are currently benefiting from support mechanisms in order to ensure the continuation of the EFF programmes on the ground.

We welcome the fact that, despite this, the amount that the EU contributes to these programmes will be no higher than the amount put forward in the Commission's original decision, i.e. a budget freeze. Given that no change has been made to the overall budget, on this occasion, we voted in favour.

James Nicholson (ECR). - Mr President, I also voted in favour of this report. In the current economic and financial crisis that is engulfing the EU zone, it is imperative that we pave the way for a smooth implementation of cohesion programmes like the European Fisheries Fund by voting in favour of this report today. This will hopefully lead to funds being injected into local rural fishing-oriented economies.

I also support the mechanisms that have been put in place that will allow provision for increased payments to be made to Member States that may have financial difficulty in implementing the programmes in question, including the Republic of Ireland, a close neighbour of my home country and constituency of Northern Ireland. We need all to do our bit to help Member States that are witnessing the side effects of financial downturn and aspire to meet the EFF aspirations.

The proposed monetary top-ups will do just this while not exceeding 10% of the maximum ceilings set in the articles of the EFF regulation.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I endorsed the resolution on the European Fisheries Fund with complete conviction because I think the fishing industry is a very important branch of the economy in the European Union, and our approach and that of the Commission to this matter shows that the European institutions are being flexible in their response to the crisis which has struck our continent.

On the one hand, we are meeting the justified expectations of interest groups and all of the fishing industry and, on the other, we are being rational in our approach to the way money is spent by the European Union. I want to stress that the fishing sector is not just a matter of economics, because it also has a health aspect. We have been talking at this parliamentary part-session about the diabetes epidemic. A healthy diet, which includes fish, is an important factor in helping us protect the health of our citizens in the European Union.

Report: Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (A7-0025/2012)

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, following the EU's ban on imports of beef and beef products from the US and Canada that have been treated with growth-promoting hormones, the US and Canada were subsequently authorised by the WTO to authorise and impose trade sanctions on EU agricultural products.

This had a high impact on farmers and producers across the EU. I am therefore pleased that a resolution has now been found to this trade dispute. The agreement to gradually lift sanctions placed on EU agricultural products in exchange for an autonomous tariff quota on high-quality beef which has not been treated with the hormones will benefit both sides of the Atlantic and will help, hopefully, to rebuild and strengthen trade relations in this sector.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). - Mr President, 40 years ago, the United Kingdom voted to join a common market. I am not sure that we understood then and I am not sure even now, after 40 years, that we fully appreciate the distinction between a free market and a customs union.

A free trade area means that goods and services and capital circulate without restrictions. It is the kind of deal that Switzerland enjoys with the European Union and one cannot help noticing that the Swiss seem to be doing pretty well with it. In a customs union, of course, you are dragged into a common commercial policy and a common external tariff.

It has been particularly disastrous to the United Kingdom, the country which did the highest percentage of its trade, without the EU, to non-European markets. We are linked into a market of similar industrialised economies, having cut ourselves off from our natural hinterland of producers. I never tire of pointing out to this House that we have confined ourselves in a cramped and declining customs union, while standing aside from the bits of the world where the growth still is, not least the wider community of English-speaking democracies. Truly our fathers made a wretched decision.

Iva Zanicchi (PPE) . - *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted in favour of this report, which aims to align some commercial policy legislative acts, including the anti-dumping regulation, with the new comitology procedures. The text voted on today supports the claims of European industry, of which Italian manufacturing is an example of excellence even at a time of crisis, by vigorously defending the trade defence instruments, which are the only way to protect European businesses and combat the anti-competitive trade practices of third-country competitors.

Charles Tannock (ECR). - Mr President, given the difficult history of transatlantic trade relations in animal products that was started by the dispute on beef hormones and chlorine-dipped chicken, the adoption of the regulation put forward today in this report is important and my ECR Group voted in favour. We believe that the regulation reinforces

the vital trade links that are already in existence across the Atlantic and will also improve access to the market on both sides, leading to more confidence.

Though the products initially affected by the ban on hormone-treated beef were few and accounted for a small volume of trade, those products affected by the subsequent retaliatory EU sanctions were far more numerous, and we hope that these sanctions will steadily be lifted and trade barriers broken down as a result of ongoing negotiations.

The regulation proposed therefore will, we believe, strengthen the long-standing transatlantic economic relationship in terms of trade, and bring economic benefits to both sides. USA-EU political and trade relations must be our number one priority, due to our shared common democratic values.

James Nicholson (ECR). - Mr President, I voted in favour of this report – although I had some concerns initially – because I believe, in the long term, this report has the ability to create a win-win situation for both the EU and Canada and the United States.

The report creates a way past some of the destructive dynamics of trade sanctions and tariffs that were founded back in the 1980s and as a result of the bans on imports of beef and beef products that had been treated by hormones into the EU from the US and Canada.

These tariffs have amounted to USD 116 million every year in the US. Canada and the US recently lifted their sanctions in the hope of creating an autonomous zero duty and tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef not treated with hormones.

To create the win-win situation for all involved, the EU needed the support of MEPs and this report will provide initially some 20 000 tonnes of high-quality beef annually. The final settlement of the beef hormone dispute will create further momentum towards greater economic and commercial integration between the EU and the US.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I hope we will make a great step today towards resolving a conflict which began as far back as 1988. As a result of this conflict, European exporters are losing around USD 116 million every year because of import bans on European products in the US market imposed by the United States as a reprisal for bans introduced by the European Union.

In principle, I am a supporter of free trade, but I also think that just as the United States should have confidence in the plant health procedures in force in Europe, we too should have confidence in food safety procedures in the United States. So it seems that what we have done today is a step in a very good direction. I hope that the United States will respond positively to this gesture of goodwill on the part of the European Union.

Report: Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (A7-0028/2012)

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, while this is a technical report which updates procedures to take into account the new scrutiny regime contained in the Lisbon Treaty, it will have important consequences for the future content of these regulations. The new role the Parliament now has under delegated acts means that we must take this scrutiny role seriously. In the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, we spend a lot of time deciding whether something is a truly technical measure that should be dealt with under implementing measures or whether it should be a delegated act in relation to which we then have the right of recall.

On the issue of commercial policy, I am certain that this balance is just as difficult as it is on financial services issues, and I am positive that this report, as it stands, has achieved the right balance.

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the anti-dumping regulation has a particularly important role in the rationalisation that is currently ongoing with the proposal known as Omnibus I. It is important to remember that in order to be effective and not damage the EU manufacturing sectors, a common commercial policy must fight for rules to be respected, as these do not apply only to a part, but to all the players.

One of the fundamental rules is correct pricing, and this means tackling dumping practices effectively and energetically. When defining the extension of trade defence procedures, the Committee on International Trade was right to confirm that the time limit in anti-dumping cases must not exceed the current time limit of 15 months when defining the extension of trade defence procedures.

We must not weaken the defence instruments, as the Commission was prepared to do after the Treaty of Lisbon came into force. Defence instruments are therefore indispensable for guaranteeing competition, safeguarding rules and protecting consumers. I am therefore voting for the resolution and would like to thank Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl for her excellent work.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – *(PL)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, fully aware of the responsibility involved, I voted in favour, together with my group. That responsibility firstly, of course, concerns the technical side and our decisions on technical matters. These decisions are, however, related to the fact that the European Parliament is gradually implementing the recommendations and gradually adapting to the increased role which our Parliament plays in European structures today in relation to the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. Naturally, I think it is very good that as part of the examination procedure, Member States which constitute a qualified majority can block a Commission proposal on commercial policy by a simple majority. This is important – as the previous speaker said – among other things, in matters concerning definitive anti-dumping measures. It is to be welcomed that we are establishing mechanisms which can protect the European market and which can protect our consumers.

Adam Bielan (ECR). – *(PL)* Mr President, despite certain fears related to the failure to carry out detailed consultations with the Member States, I decided to endorse the report. The regulation enables certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy to be adapted to the requirements of the Treaty of Lisbon. In particular, this concerns the implementing acts dealing with the uniform transposition of European law in this area in all Member States and replacing the current comitology procedure.

An important tool here will be introduction of the advisory and examination procedures provided for in the Treaty. Application of the concept of delegated acts will also enable proper supervision of Parliament in this area. Inclusion in the regulation of key demands made by the European Parliament, such as the adoption of provisions concerning the reduction and abolition of the Common Customs Tariff duties on the products of some tariff headings, for example, is a good sign.

I hope that these regulations will allow for improved commercial exchange between the EU's Member States and third countries, and that this will deliver benefits to the citizens.

Report: Giovanni La Via (A7-0040/2012)

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, along with my political group, the European Conservatives and Reformists, I would like to see a significant reduction of the EU budget. I therefore cannot support this report, as it defends the size of a proposed, larger EU budget, which, at this time, I cannot justify to my constituents in Wales.

A number of EU Member States are implementing harsh austerity measures which have had a devastating impact on people's livelihoods. In this light, therefore, it would be completely unjustifiable to defend any increase in the EU budget. All EU institutions need to demonstrate the ability to tighten budgets at this difficult economic time. The 2013 budget should reflect this.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). - Mr President, three things are certain in life: death, taxes and constant rises in the EU budget. Our gross and net contributions as a country are shooting up, and it is not just us. At a time when all 27 Member States are looking to find cuts in their domestic spending, all of those savings are being swallowed up in their higher contributions to Brussels.

Now we are told that all this money is being used to create jobs and stimulate prosperity. Those Members who do not read English might like to look at Frédéric Bastiat on the question of creating jobs, the question of seen and unseen costs. Every euro that we take out of the private sector to create jobs is a euro that would have otherwise been spent on creating actual wealth. The only jobs we are creating here are the jobs of people whose job is to destroy genuine job creation: the licensors, the inspectors, the clerks, the compliance officers, the whole regulatory machine of EU enforcement.

How can we carry on in a system where, in order to pay for these constantly rising budgets, simply in the time that I have been speaking, my constituents have handed over something like GBP 120 000? So I am going to stop speaking and sit down.

Alfredo Antonozzi (PPE). - *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, before my explanation of vote, I would like to explain that I am wearing this T-shirt because I would like to ask the European Union to take decisive steps to secure the liberation of the two Italian soldiers, Captain Massimiliano Latorre and Sergeant Salvatore Girone, who have been unjustly detained for doing their duty against piracy.

Mr President, the new general guidelines of the European Parliament on the 2013 budget will define the guidelines, objectives and strategies to be followed by the Commission when preparing the draft budget. The report in question sets out the key points for reviving the European economy in the light of the effects of, and the issues caused by, the ongoing nature of the economic crisis. I welcome the initiative not just because it makes the EU budget an ideal vehicle for encouraging cohesion between Member States, but also because it embodies an opportunity to review and adapt the new budget to the needs of the economic crisis that has hit the euro area.

The initiative proposed by Mr La Via has my full support, and I especially welcome the request made to the Council not to make artificial cuts that do not take into account the effective absorption capacity of the programmes and consequently delay the implementation of cohesion policies.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR). - Mr President, this report calls for collective efforts to help the European economy. What it means in practice is more Europe and more money.

I am totally committed to an agenda of growth and jobs. However, I do not believe that the way to achieve it is with more Europe. We need less red tape and fewer regulations, which will leave businesses free to flourish.

This Parliament has squandered its opportunity to send out a strong signal. We should have called on the Commission to deliver more for less money. We should have reflected the will of our citizens and called for a freeze on the European budget, but, as usual, we chickened out, and that is why I cannot support this report.

Diane Dodds (NI). - Mr President, I voted against this report.

Once again, further political integration is cited as a prerequisite for dealing with the economic and social woes of the EU. I would contend that, rather than being the firm foundation or the cornerstone of any future recovery, the desire for political integration is the sinking sand that has led to the EU facing economic collapse. Yet ideology still blinds reality, and while that remains the case, the much-needed recovery will not occur at a satisfactory pace.

The report states that austerity being imposed in Member States should not be replicated in the EU budget. What arrogance! Indeed, the report demands yet more money from Member States to the EU. 'Do as I say, not as I do' seems to be the message that emanates from this Parliament so often.

It is time to cut the waste from the EU budget. Target resources effectively to promote growth and, importantly, lead by example.

Peter Jahr (PPE). - (DE) Mr President, I have voted in favour of this report because the rapporteur, Mr La Via, has done a good job and has reached the necessary compromise. We know that there are no quick solutions to the problems of achieving our strategic goals, reducing red tape and ensuring that our bureaucracy, in other words, the administration and the Commission, spends less money. These issues need careful consideration. Ultimately, we must start by adopting the necessary legislation and regulations which will ensure that we have less red tape and fewer controls.

I would like to mention one small problem. I would have liked us to have voted in favour of the amendment by the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, which called for 2013 to be devoted to economic recovery after the financial consolidation. This is the only problem, but I was able to vote in favour of the report as a whole.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). - (FI) Mr President, firstly, I would like to say that I voted in favour of this report. It contains a lot of good things, and we could say that it is a step in the right direction, although it is perhaps unsatisfactory in some respects.

In any case, I think it is now important to recognise that we in Europe are facing challenging times economically, and, during such times, we must have the courage to make additional cuts, though not do so for its own sake. We have to make the priority in the budget one that would enable growth. This means that if we want to achieve recovery and growth in the European economy, we must invest in research, development and innovation, and we must invest in education. In other words, these are the basis and foundation on which to build new growth in Europe.

It is very important in this respect to realise that we need more investment in these sectors. We can cut bureaucracy and such unnecessary extras, but we need investment in education,

innovation and research and development for the European economy to recover and embark on a path to growth.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as with all the Poles who are members of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, I voted in a different way from our group and endorsed this report. I do see the arguments of all those who are talking about the need for savings in the EU budget and the need to fight bureaucracy. They are good and commendable principles and they should be supported but, all the same, it should be remembered that those who will lose most over cuts in the EU budget are principally the new Member States, and it is these Member States which today need support from the European Union to make up the distance in terms of their economy and infrastructure which separates them from the wealthy countries of the old Europe. In Poland, we had already opened our market to goods from the European Union at the beginning of the 1990s – we did not protect our market. British, Italian and Dutch firms made huge sums from the opportunities afforded by the Polish market. Today, the moment has come in which our citizens are entitled to demand that Europe help them – Europe is helping, but we do not want it to stop.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, I voted for freezing the EU budget. In fact, I am in favour of the EU making savings in its budget.

The Member States of the EU are living on credit. They accrue debt in their everyday expenditure and in their EU membership contributions also. In addition, the Member States are having to make major cuts to their national budgets.

In such a situation, the EU has to set an example. It must also be innovative and find areas where the EU itself can save money. It cannot order its Member States to make savings. Those Member States that do not save enough are penalised, but the EU itself is not prepared to look for areas where savings can be made. We must be able to find areas in the EU budget where savings can be made in Parliament, the Commission and the Council, and the EU should use the money for growth and employment.

Proposal for a decision: B7-0150/2012

Kay Swinburne (ECR). – Mr President, whilst, in principle, I can support measures which enhance cross-border coordination and the sharing of best practice across the EU in the field of civil law, I am unable, however, to support this resolution on judicial training. At present, there are already a number of online tools and initiatives available which aim to resolve cross-border legal problems that may be encountered. It seems, therefore, that this would duplicate initiatives which already exist.

Moreover, the proposal for the establishment of ‘Erasmus of judges’ networks seems to be wholly unnecessary and a complete waste of EU resources. This resolution does not respect the principle of subsidiarity and, as judicial systems are firmly matters for Member States, we should refrain from harmonising or centralising such issues.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I endorsed this resolution. I think the role of the European institutions and the European Parliament is to help the citizens. We have many legal systems in the European Union, and I am glad we do, because I support diversity in the Union. The Member States differ significantly from each other and we do, of course, support the fact that interpersonal, economic and cultural contacts between EU citizens from different Member States are increasing. This naturally gives rise to the need

for a better knowledge of the legal systems which will affect EU citizens when travelling or involved in professional, cultural or any other kind of activity in different countries.

I think, therefore, that this type of coordination is needed, although, of course, it should be kept within the bounds of common sense and it should, of course, respect the money of European taxpayers.

Proposal for a decision: B7-0126/2012

Emma McClarkin (ECR). - Mr President, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes clear the importance of education; in particular, it states that parties shall make primary education compulsory and freely available to all. I do not need to spell out the importance of this in the development of young children into responsible literate adults who can play active roles in society. So it is with the utmost urgency that we must assist in tackling the problem that is the 215 million children across the world who continue to engage in labour activities which should be abolished.

By its very nature – a labour intensive, often family-run enterprise – cocoa farming can, in some instances, pose a major problem. West Africa, where 70% of the world's cocoa is cultivated, is the obvious example. Progress in abolishing the use of child labour is hampered by ongoing conflict in the region and it is also difficult to change attitudes amongst families and communities.

I recognise that there are work activities which are acceptable for children to participate in, as long as the opportunity remains for educational activity. However, cocoa farming has been shown to pose major risks for child labourers often without the opportunity for education. I therefore support the resolution voted on today opposing the use of forced child labour in the cocoa industry.

Andrea Zanoni (ALDE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, 215 million children worldwide used as child labour, 152 million child workers under the age of 15, 115 million children involved in dangerous activities – these are shocking figures that we can no longer tolerate. I voted in favour of the resolution on child labour in the cocoa sector, with absolute conviction, because the European Union has to play a fundamental role in stopping this form of modern slavery.

The Commission must do its utmost to include effective provisions that will guarantee dignified employment and prevent forced child labour in all trade agreements with cocoa producing countries such as Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. We need a traceability mechanism to identify goods produced using child labour. The European Union has always defended the rights of the world's most vulnerable people, and children working in the harvesting of cocoa beans deserve our full attention.

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, child labour in any sector is something that the EU should play a part in eradicating around the world. By refusing to sign trade agreements with Uzbekistan, which continues to use child labour in cotton picking, it will make other regions in the world realise that, in order to continue trading with the EU, they do have to reach basic minimum standards of rights.

This report cites the statistic that 215 million children across the world are currently engaged in child labour, a shocking figure in this day and age. Ultimately, we must continue to use our trading power to eradicate these abuses and, hopefully, show other countries

that educating their children, instead of putting them to work at such a young age, is the real way to achieve growth and a more vibrant and intelligent economy in the future.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we are often unaware of the ways and means by which some products we use on a daily basis are made, and do not know that in some cases, these products are made through the work of more than 200 million children. Of these, 150 million are under the age of 15 and are involved in highly dangerous work. Unfortunately, the cocoa industry is one of those involved in this system of exploitation.

Stamping out child labour is a duty and a responsibility for all those countries and multinationals involved, which sometimes refuse to disclose their financial flows. In compliance with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, I hope that the possibility of setting up a body to monitor production chains in order to combat child abuse and exploitation and to introduce a cocoa product traceability system will be taken into consideration.

Mitro Repo (S&D). - *(FI)* Mr President, I supported the report because the chocolate purchased by us European consumers is frequently produced in questionable ways, using child labour. We know that the cocoa plantations in West Africa, in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, produce almost all the world's cocoa, which is the main raw material for chocolate. The European Commission and the European External Action Service should monitor developments in these countries very carefully and ensure that the EU does not establish trade relations with countries that engage in the worst forms of child labour.

The use of child labour in the cocoa sector is also an indication of the huge socio-economic and political challenges that we still face. This is not just a matter of the social responsibility of European companies: the European Union is a community of values based on human rights, and that is why we cannot accept the flagrant use of child labour – in the cultivation and harvesting of cocoa beans, for example.

Diane Dodds (NI). - Mr President, it is estimated that approximately 250 000 children, many against their will, work in the cocoa plantations in West Africa. In recent years, there has been some progress through programmes and initiatives aimed at combating the worst forms of child labour. However, there is still much work to be done.

The Ivory Coast exports nearly half the world's cocoa. This is a country ravaged by years of civil war with the majority of its citizens in extreme poverty. As a result, cocoa farms have traditionally been worked by the family unit, children included, in order to reduce labour costs.

Therefore, I believe that the only way to break the cycle of child labour is through combating such poverty. This is the only way that countries such as the Ivory Coast can progress – through the building of roads, hospitals, social centres and, in particular, schools – to give the children and their parents a chance of a better future.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). - *(RO)* Mr President, I voted in favour of this resolution because child labour in West African agriculture is a highly sensitive topic, the proportions of the phenomenon being difficult to estimate in figures. Widespread poverty, conflicts and poor harvests in recent years have aggravated the situation. Last year, tensions in Côte d'Ivoire led to 200 000 tonnes being blocked in production and increased prices by up to 9% per day on the Euronext Paris stock exchange.

Now, the EU is dependent on cocoa imports from countries such as Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire, but trade relations should not be an obstacle to cooperation with Interpol in this area, particularly regarding trafficking of minors. Moreover, large-scale implementation of the concept of fair trade would ensure a decent standard of living for parents and the chance of an education for children.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I did, of course, endorse this document. I think that these are important moments in the history and the work of our Parliament, moments when, in spite of the differences which do very clearly exist between us, we are able, for the sake of the values which have brought us together here, to rise above those divisions and vote the same way – as is the case with this problem, a problem which, as we say in Poland, is ‘crying to heaven for vengeance’. A situation in which millions of children, tens of millions of children across the world, are abused, forced to work, deprived of their childhood and deprived of their own future, is a situation which must not be tolerated. It is to be greatly welcomed that the European Parliament is taking up this question and that we are trying to get to the heart of the matter. We want to investigate the channels by which these products are moved and by which they reach the European market. We in Europe are a major buyer of many products, and this includes cocoa, and we have the resources to find out if products which reach the European market and which are paid for by European consumers are illegal products – illegal in the eyes of international law – since the producers utilise child labour.

Recommendation: Vital Moreira (A7-0024/2012)

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, it goes without saying that I endorsed the document on the International Cocoa Agreement – this document, is of course, related to what we were talking about just now. The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 replaces the 2001 agreement, to which the EU is a party. It is a step in the right direction and, among other things, it appeals specifically for transparency in the production of cocoa, because – as we were saying a moment ago – there is a huge problem with the illegal use of child labour. However, we are also talking here about reducing trade barriers, we are talking about improved access to the European market for this product, for cocoa, which – as we have also said here – is an important export product of countries that are very poor. On condition that child labour will not be used in the production of cocoa, we should most definitely support a situation in which a wealthy Europe promotes the development of poor countries by buying this product from them.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). - (FI) Mr President, I think that it is very important now to ensure that the European Union adheres to its values. Central to these is the matter of human rights and also the rights of children associated with them. Consequently, we must be very careful not to expose children to dangers of this kind in any circumstances. Instead, we should ensure that they continue to develop holistically and that we consider their physical, motor, cognitive and intellectual development, and do everything possible to bring that about.

That being the case, we must dissociate ourselves very determinedly and clearly from the use of child labour, and when we conclude agreements on cocoa and other commodities, we also need to ensure that our partners do not expose children to such dangers to save costs. Children must have the right to a childhood and children's rights, which are human rights.

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, removing trade barriers and involving both producer and consumer countries alongside the private sector is the way in which the global market ought to operate and is what we should be striving to facilitate in more sectors.

One of the most important aspects of this report relates to its requirement to produce more analysis, statistics and impact assessments on what the causes of trade barriers are in this particular sector. I hope this will inform the decisions of global bodies as they look to better regulate the commodities markets more widely.

We need to ensure we have specific data on every asset class in order to provide a highly sophisticated mechanism for our commodities and agricultural derivative products that will not curb the activities of the producers and consumers whose trade we are encouraging with this cocoa agreement.

Motion for a resolution: B7-0150/2012

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, at present, it is thought that almost 10% of the EU population is affected in some form by diabetes. With the increase in obesity and an ageing population, this number has been projected to increase dramatically over the coming years. Both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes are treatable and, as Type 2 is linked to lifestyle factors, it can be addressed by effective preventative strategies such as increasing exercise and making adjustments to diet.

Whilst health care is a national competence, it is sensible that a joined-up approach is taken and that sharing best practice and enhanced cooperation between Member States, particularly in research and in the development of new tools to diagnose diabetes at an earlier stage, are put into place. It would be equally beneficial for Member States to share their knowledge on disease management and treatment guidelines so that the best preventative and treatment regimes can be adopted.

I therefore support the joint resolution, which seeks to address the EU diabetes epidemic, as I believe that an EU strategy would be beneficial in this instance, particularly with the additional strain this disease is putting on the Welsh health care budget in current economically difficult times.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR). - Mr President, across the UK, nearly 3 million people suffer from diabetes. With obesity on the rise and an ageing population, the estimated cost of diabetes on the health care system is expected to increase to nearly 10% of our annual health care budget.

This is not isolated to the UK. Figures show that approximately one in ten people in the EU are affected by this. While health care is a Member State competency and responsibility, I believe the sharing of best practice will be hugely beneficial. The concept of an EU strategy which aims to improve cooperation, share research and spread best practice is an opportunity to utilise the knowledge and resources the EU has available. This is an epidemic we can take control of if we act together. I therefore supported this report.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the statistics on diabetes are disturbing. It has become a problem of epidemic proportions that claims more than 300 000 lives each year. It is a chronic illness that accounts for between 10% and 20% of national health expenditure. At present, there is still no treatment capable of bringing

the illness under control, and whilst it has luckily been declared a non-communicable disease, it will inevitably spread as a result of ageing populations and unhealthy lifestyles.

The European Union must continue to direct its efforts towards preventing diabetes and obesity, alongside strategies on healthy lifestyles and early diagnosis. The European Union must also implement an effective and innovative targeted strategy at national level and guarantee constant financial support to research projects.

Mitro Repo (S&D). - (FI) Mr President, I voted in favour of this report, since diabetes not only causes human suffering but also results in substantial costs to the economy as the number of people with diabetes in Europe is still growing at an alarming rate.

Type 2 diabetes is a lifestyle disease, and one way to prevent it is to provide people with adequate and comprehensible information on food that is good for the health. The labelling on food packaging should not be misleading: consumers must be able to make the best choices for their health themselves. The right diet and exercise can prevent people from contracting diabetes. Health affects a person's whole life in every way, and it is therefore important to do everything possible to support the prevention of diabetes. That is why I am strongly in favour of this report.

Diane Dodds (NI). - Mr President, recent figures show that 2.9 million people in the United Kingdom have been diagnosed with diabetes. This figure includes those diagnosed in my own constituency of Northern Ireland with an estimated 73 500 people currently living with this illness. There are thought to be thousands more who have the condition but do not yet know it.

Diabetes is on the increase in Northern Ireland, as it is across Europe. Over the last six years, the number of people in my own constituency diagnosed with this condition has increased by almost 41%. A recent report entitled 'Diabetes in the National Health Service' estimated a total cost of GBP 3.5 billion per annum. That is over GBP 9.6 million per day to treat this illness.

With 100 000 people in the UK diagnosed every year, health costs are spiralling and placing an increased strain on government resources. It is therefore vital that we become more proactive in combating this condition through education and increased awareness, with an emphasis on healthy diet and exercise as a means of prevention.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). - (RO) Mr President, I voted in favour of this resolution because I believe that the fight against diabetes must be intensified by all means. I refer here, first of all, to prevention. Given that, by 2030, over 16% of European citizens will be affected by this disease, it is necessary to educate the population in this regard. Unfortunately, diabetes is an incurable disease, but there are plenty of ways to prevent its onset. Therefore, Europe must invest more in promoting sports and encouraging a healthy lifestyle.

Precise and rapid diagnosis of both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes is another important element. This would ensure the appropriate treatment of patients and reduced costs resulting from subsequent complications.

Charles Tannock (ECR). - Mr President, I voted in favour of the Council and Commission statements on addressing the EU diabetes epidemic. Health care provision is primarily a Member State responsibility, but the modest proposals put forward would have a positive impact in the field of diabetes research.

Diabetes is a chronic disease that affects almost 10% of the total EU population and accounts for over 10% of expenditure across the EU in health care. With an ageing European population, these figures are expected to increase.

We believe that an EU strategy at the level of consensus on the public health aspects would help to improve cooperation between the Member States and provide a mechanism to share best medical practice between health care professionals from across the European Union in primary prevention diagnosis management and monitoring. I support the calls for continued research funding under the European framework programmes.

I declare a personal interest, being both a medical doctor and a middle-aged man and being overweight with a strong family history of diabetes, so I am at a high risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, which actually – very sadly – killed my late grandfather.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). - (FI) Mr President, I voted in favour of this report. It is very important that we try to do all we can at EU level to prevent the growth in the number of diabetes cases. As has been said, diabetes is now an epidemic of sorts, and the number of cases has increased dramatically, especially those relating to Type 2 diabetes, which is very largely the consequence of changes in lifestyle and the role that diet and exercise play in people's health.

While health care issues mainly fall within the competence of the Member States under the principle of subsidiarity, in my view, it is nevertheless a good thing that people are being made aware of these matters of public health and this risk at EU level. It is also good that an attempt is being made to encourage Member States to act to ensure that children and young people are told about the effects of healthy eating and healthy lifestyle while still at school, and that everything possible is being done to try to prevent any further increase in cases of Type 2 diabetes and to bring it under control.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). - (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, 10% of the European Union's population are suffering from diabetes. Changes in the development of civilisation, changing lifestyles and the ageing of European society mean that the problem of diabetes is going to affect an increasing number of our citizens. This is why I endorsed this document at today's vote. I think the scale of the diabetes problem is so great today that all institutions – both at the level of national governments and as indeed we have done today at the level of the entire Union – should tackle this problem both by promoting a healthy lifestyle and good diet and by increasing spending on specific medical research into this problem. I am pleased that the European Parliament has adopted this document by such a large majority today.

Seán Kelly (PPE). - (GA) Mr President, it was to be expected that a large majority would be in favour of this short article today as everyone wants to cure this disease or, better still, to prevent it.

As regards prevention, I came across a staggering statistic recently at a health forum in Brussels, where it said that 97% of health expenses in the European Union were spent on trying to treat various ailments and only 3% was invested in trying to find cures and, particularly, on prevention.

Therefore, I agree completely with Kay Swinburne, who says that in research, there should be huge emphasis on prevention. There is too much on trying to find cures and not enough on prevention. For instance, many people would like to change their behavioural pattern and to have a better lifestyle but they struggle to do so. That is an example of where we

should do some research. Also Ms Băsescu mentioned the importance of sport. I certainly agree with that, and particularly in the next multiannual financial framework, there should be a budget for health-related sport and various activities.

Motion for a resolution: B7-0127/2012

Kay Swinburne (ECR). - Mr President, I welcome the positive statements in the enlargement report for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I feel that many other accession countries, including Serbia – which was accepted last week by the European Council for EU candidate status – could look to the example that has been set by Macedonia's engagement with the EU over the last few years.

The two countries have faced similar problems in their recent history and need to come to terms with both their own population's problems and their ongoing disputes with their neighbours. Macedonia's dispute over its name with Greece should not be directly compared to the situation between Belgrade and Priština. However, the sensible way that Macedonia is dealing with its neighbours, and the EU as a whole, in order to overcome that dispute, can provide a good starting point on which others, including Serbia, could model their approaches over the next few years.

Alfredo Antoniozzi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I travelled personally to Macedonia during the last presidential elections as an envoy of the Group of the European People's Party (PPE) in order to support Prime Minister Gruevski's electoral campaign. Having met thousands of people, I was able to observe personally that it is not just the institutions but also the people who are decisively in favour of joining the European Union.

This is why I believe we cannot put off starting negotiations, which have been suspended, for much longer, and should resume them as a matter of urgency. The 2011 progress report presented by the Commission shows that for the third consecutive year, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has managed to maintain positive progress in line with European standards in terms of political criteria and the development of a market economy. Therefore, I am confident that FYROM will manage to overcome the political and structural limitations that are still holding it back, and give my full support to the resumption of negotiations.

Mitro Repo (S&D). - (FI) Mr President, it is extremely regrettable that the dispute over its name continues to obstruct Macedonia's membership of the EU and prevent the enlargement process from going forward. The European Union has promised all the Balkan countries an opportunity to be part of the enlargement process. Macedonia was one of the first countries in the region to be granted EU candidate status. Besides, the Macedonians are very much in favour of the EU – at least they are for now.

For three years in succession, the European Commission has issued a recommendation for the start of EU accession talks with Macedonia, but the Council has simply not as yet reached agreement on the matter. The Commission has also succumbed to linguistic censorship; it does not use the terms Macedonia or Macedonian. The UN does not act in this way.

The EU would do well to take a look in the mirror. It has a responsibility for ensuring that no country is left behind. The credibility of the entire EU accession process may be jeopardised, simply because of this dispute over a name. Macedonia's progress, of course, is primarily dependent on Macedonia itself, but the EU should not have the right to close the door in its face because of such a political dispute over its name.

Mario Pirillo (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia shows its strong desire to join the European Union. It is a strategic country in the Balkan region, is involved in several European initiatives, and is giving proof of cooperation and openness.

The reforms of the judicial system, administrative decentralisation and initial, if weak, signs of a willingness to discuss freedom of expression are very hopeful signs for the future. However, the following issues are still worrying: respect for human rights, corruption levels and the lack of pluralism in the media. This country still has a long way to go, and the years leading up to its entry must act as a stimulus to speed up the necessary reforms for the country's democracy to develop. I believe in an enlarged, strong Europe, and therefore I voted in favour of the resolution.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Mr President, for the first time in the five years that I have been in the European Parliament, I voted against the report on Macedonia's accession to the European Union. Why? I previously voted in favour because, in spite of all the problems, I thought that doing this might give some encouragement to the country to carry out reforms.

The five-year period that I have been an MEP is more or less equivalent to half the time the process takes for a country to join the Union at the normal rate of progress. This is a long time, yet all the while people who consider themselves Bulgarian continue to be persecuted in Macedonia and the hate talk continues in the media, schoolbooks, films and in any way sponsored by the State.

I find such actions unacceptable and I can no longer continue to support a country which, in my view, does not meet the political criteria, undertaking such actions against a neighbouring country and even against its own citizens, especially as we have also seen that freedom of speech is being affected, which is a change for the worse and not the better.

Elena Bănescu (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, I voted in favour of this report because I wish to see stability in the Balkans and relations with the European Union contribute to ensuring it. Skopje has made some progress in terms of democratic reforms. They must, however, continue, especially in areas such as the judicial system and the fight against corruption. I also emphasise the need for more transparency on public expenditure and the financing of political parties.

Nevertheless, I appreciate the position of the Macedonian authorities in considering multiculturalism to be the social and political model of the country. The Romanian minority is recognised and enjoys fair treatment. I wish to point out the progress made towards Roma integration in the education system and their representation in the public sector. Still, I draw attention to the fact that continued efforts are needed to improve the situation of this community.

Charles Tannock (ECR). - Mr President, the ECR supported the Howitt report on Macedonia. The text calls on the Council to confirm the Commission's call for a priority date now to be set for EU accession negotiations to commence, and I back this call.

The persistent Greek veto over the name issue has gone on far too long. I believe that bilateral issues should not be an obstacle to Macedonia's further EU integration as they have been since the country was given candidate status as far back as 2005. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Gruevski, Macedonia has made progress in the fields of

parliamentary cooperation, economic development, inter-ethnic reconciliation, decentralisation, human rights and public administration.

The responsible and measured way in which the government has dealt with the recent ethnic tensions between the Albanian community and the Macedonian Slavs in the country is testimony to Macedonia's progress. The recent International Court of Justice verdict against Greece over Macedonia's accession to NATO needs to be listened to by the whole of the European Union and respected.

Adam Bielan (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, enlargement in the Balkans is the next stage in the development of European integration. The Republic of Macedonia is already an important and close economic partner of the EU. I think therefore that it is a priority in our relations with Macedonia to set a date for the start of accession negotiations without further delay. In endorsing the resolution, I would like to express my full approval, both for the pro-European policy of the government in Skopje and the Euro-Atlantic aspirations seen in Macedonia's status as a candidate for NATO membership – questions of European security should go hand in hand with the idea of enlargement.

Also worthy of note is the progress Macedonia has made in economic development, gaining recognition in the World Bank report as the third most successful country over the past five years in undertaking regulatory reforms. Another success is Macedonia's strategy for tackling corruption, which is reflected in its significantly improved position in the Transparency International anti-corruption index. I am sure that the country's economic potential and the increasing stability of its domestic politics will be its strength in the negotiation process.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, for many years, the Balkans were a dangerous trouble spot in the history and politics of Europe. Today, we should greatly welcome the fact that successive Balkan countries are declaring, and declaring sincerely, that they have European aspirations. They want to become part of our Union, which, from the moment of its establishment, in a way which was without precedent in the history of our continent, has been an area of economic growth, rising prosperity and, above all, peace. It is no surprise therefore that countries which have seen so much unrest, countries which have been through wars, want to be together with us. Therefore, I support Macedonia's aspirations to be in the European Union, and I would also like to appeal from here to our Greek friends to stop raising the problem of the name 'Republic of Macedonia'. I think that in today's Europe, there should be no room for this kind of narrow, chauvinistic approach. We should all share our continent with each other in a spirit of friendship and understanding.

Motion for a resolution: B7-0125/2012

Kay Swinburne (ECR). – Mr President, when discussing the enlargement process in relation to Iceland, it is very hard to do so solely on the technical level of the Copenhagen criteria and *acquis*, as the situation is very different from that of those Member States that have joined the EU since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of Communism in Europe.

Yet we must be very careful to be even-handed in our approach and ensure that Iceland genuinely does fulfil all of the EU criteria before joining. In the area of financial services, we need to be very careful to ensure that Iceland's reformed banking system is now truly following all of the necessary EU regulations in this field.

The issue of Icesave is still of huge concern in the UK, where many individuals and local authorities lost significant amounts of money because of the lax system of regulation previously in force in Iceland. While separating this specific issue out from the accession process might be a sensible approach, I believe we must ensure the issue is resolved as soon as possible and appropriate measures are taken to avoid it happening again.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). - Mr President, there was some rather ugly Schadenfreude in this Chamber following the collapse of the Icelandic Banks. A number of federalist colleagues, British and continental, were coming up to me saying, 'Ah, Hannan, how are your Icelanders doing now. This is what happens to you if you remain standoffish about Europe'.

Well, who is laughing now? Iceland, having devalued because it was not in the euro, has exported its way to growth and enjoys a rate of growth which is the envy of the eurozone stricken economies and, because it did not make this terrible mistake of assuming the bad debts of private institutions, it will begin, once this Icesave dispute is cleared, with a debt-to-GDP ratio which is the envy of Europe. 67% of Icelanders in the last poll are now against EU membership because they understand what it would mean: their resources plundered, their seas emptied, their democracy vitiated, the oldest parliament in the world turned into a local authority chamber.

Icelanders are a shrewd and canny people with wisdom bred in the bone by hundreds of years of struggling in difficult conditions. They know far better than to throw away their freedom.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR). - Mr President, I voted against this resolution, not because I believe Iceland should not become a member of the EU, but because the resolution states that money owed by Iceland's Landsbanki after the collapse of Icesave must not be an obstacle to accession. As a Conservative MEP for London, I cannot possibly agree to these terms.

Local authorities in London are suffering from painful cuts after the economic downturn and thirteen years of wasteful Labour government. Six London councils had a total of GBP 120 million invested in Icesave; Transport for London invested a further GBP 40 million and London's Metropolitan Police, GBP 30 million. These councils and organisations have not seen a penny of their money back since the Bank's collapse in October 2008.

The Icelandic Government is dodging its legal obligation to pay minimum compensation to these and other British debtors. Margaret Thatcher once said: we are simply asking to have our own money back. That is what we are asking of Iceland. Until they pay up, I cannot support their membership.

Mitro Repo (S&D). - *(FI)* Mr President, in the midst of the European economic crisis, even we politicians have all too often forgotten how much stability, prosperity and well-being the European Union has also produced for its Member States.

Iceland's economy and financial sector are recovering. In Iceland, the European Union will be getting a Member State with a history that goes back a long way, strong democratic traditions, and an active civil society. Iceland will function in the EU as a strategic bridgehead in the Arctic region. At the same time, it also has a good deal of know-how in the area of renewable energy.

Iceland already meets the Copenhagen criteria and is thus eligible for EU membership. Nevertheless, Iceland's accession to the EU should not be taken for granted. For example,

a threshold issue is the ending of whaling. The EU accession process proceeds on the basis of each country's achievements. We can, however, congratulate ourselves on the fact that the Icelander's eagerness to join us shows that the EU is still an attractive prospect.

David Campbell Bannerman (ECR). - Mr President, I voted against Iceland joining the EU because I think, as two-thirds of Icelandic people thought in a poll just last month, that Iceland would be mad to join the EU.

Mad because membership would destroy Iceland's key industry – fishing – through the disastrous common fisheries policy, just as it has destroyed 100 000 jobs in the UK in fishing and nearly all the fishing in my own constituency of the East of England. Mad because they would have to join the disastrous euro as well and abandon the free floating króna, which has brought a boom in exports. Mad, too, because its economy would be weighed down with a barrage of EU red tape. Its growth rate is currently 3.1%, whereas the EU's GDP forecast is 0 for this year. Why risk it?

As for Icesave, there are other legal mechanisms outside the EU, such as the EFTA court, which has already ruled that Iceland must pay up.

So we must stop kidding ourselves in the EU that Iceland wants to join. Iceland's sane option, as I believe Britain's is too, is to stay proud, independent and self-governing.

Diane Dodds (NI). - Mr President, there is a constituency within the United Kingdom whose advice to Iceland would be to learn from the UK's mistake and stay out of the EU. Another opinion this Parliament should consider is that, if you apply for membership of any club, you usually precede your application with a clear demonstration of your eligibility for membership by complying with the existing rules of the club.

In respect of fisheries management, specifically regarding mackerel, Iceland has ignored such a commitment and wants to rewrite the rules before it joins the club. If this Parliament has any principles, it should send a clear message to Iceland that its behaviour in respect of mackerel is unacceptable and sets a dangerous precedent in terms of how Iceland might flout the EU's plethora of other regulations.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). - (RO) Mr President, I voted in favour of the report of Mr Cristian Preda because it offers a balanced assessment of the status of accession negotiations with Iceland. This country could become an enlargement success story. Its integration can bring economic benefits, but it can also strengthen the EU's foreign policy, with regard as well to the transatlantic relationship. It would also help develop the Arctic dimension of regional policy. Moreover, Iceland's progress can have beneficial effects in terms of stimulating the other candidate countries. At the same time, due attention should be paid to public information and communication, given the existing differences in Iceland regarding the European integration project.

Finally, I wish to welcome Iceland's decision to lift labour market restrictions for Romanian workers. I believe it contributes to strengthening the European Economic Area.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). - (PL) Mr President, I endorsed this report because I think that the European Union should enlarge, and that it should enlarge to include all countries which share our values – countries which are democratic, which respect human rights and which respect the conditions necessary for a free economy and free management of the economy. This is certainly true in the case of Iceland.

In my opinion, what has happened in Iceland in recent years should be instructive – for us in the European Union too. I am thinking of the very serious crisis – the unprecedented financial and political crisis – and also of the ways in which Iceland is recovering from this crisis. I think there are very many reasons why it would be good if the European Union enlarged to include Iceland, but, of course, we have to remember that it takes two to tango. For Iceland to become a member of the European Union, the will of Iceland's voters and citizens is needed as well.

Motion for a resolution: B7-0129/2012

Eduard Kukan (PPE). - Mr President, I voted in favour of the resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina. I hope that it will send a message for reflection to the politicians in the country and that it will stimulate them to engage with the reforms which the country urgently needs. I would also like to stress in this connection that it is of the utmost importance that the politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina find the courage and political will to work together.

Culture of compromise and constructive dialogue is the key for the future progress of the country. Major issues such as constitutional reform, reform of the judiciary and further economic and social reforms would not be possible without common effort. I believe that progress of the country in the future development and integration processes is in the interests of our security and stability of the region but, most importantly, in the interests of European citizens and the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). - (RO) Mr President, I voted in favour of this report because the prolonged political deadlock has affected the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its European course. I hope that the formation of government will allow the pursuit of necessary reforms to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and economic development. The positive internal climate gives this country the opportunity to move forward in its relationship with the EU. I hope this opportunity will be utilised.

The EU has an important role in this respect: to identify ways to encourage positive developments. However, it must avoid taking positions that could cause internal tensions in this country. I welcome the progress made by Sarajevo in improving the situation of the Roma, but it must be continued. I reiterate the importance of full implementation of the mining sector strategy, the subject matter of an amendment I tabled, for ensuring complete security of all citizens.

Charles Tannock (ECR). - Mr President, I voted along with the ECR in favour of the enlargement report on Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We believe that the report highlights some important issues in this complex and divided country. Particularly important is the need for the central state and its institutions in Sarajevo to be strengthened and respected before it can progress further, and we support the proposition that EU presence in the country should be increased.

The fight against corruption in the country must also be continued robustly and the report calls for reform in many areas, particularly of the judiciary and education systems and in the protection of minorities, which, of course, are extremely important topics.

The BiH Government must also address the rise of imported Wahhabi extremism in the region and must investigate the security threat that it poses. The report is right to highlight

this, as radicalising one section of the community against another confession does not augur well for the future, for peace or for nation-building in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Adam Bielan (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, Bosnia and Herzegovina is the country which suffered most as a result of the long war in the Balkans. It is still regularly troubled by domestic unrest, such as that caused by the intensification of Wahhabi extremism throughout the region. In view of the complicated power structure, the formation of a new government should be seen as grounds for optimism, while we should also encourage full implementation of the agreement made by political party leaders, including dialogue to ensure that budgetary procedures and essential reforms are carried out efficiently. In addition, Brussels' commitment, as seen in its extension of the role of the Special Representative, allows us to help in efforts for progress on issues related to acceleration of the process of Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the Union. I would also like to express the hope that matters related to charges of war crimes and the elimination of terrorist threats will be settled. I also welcome the intensified efforts of the governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia to resolve outstanding issues, including the extension of regional cooperation in the field of security. This is why I voted for adoption of the resolution.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a place which has special significance, and I have no hesitation in saying that Bosnia and Herzegovina is the guilty conscience of Europe today. Almost 20 years ago, this former Yugoslav republic witnessed the most horrific crimes to be committed in Europe since the Second World War. At the time, a helpless West looked on at it all and did not help – something I think we still regret today – and we and the majority of all the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who lost fathers and children still find this a cause for weeping.

Therefore, it seems today that help given to Bosnia and Herzegovina in its European aspirations represents the payment of a specific kind of moral debt which Europe has to this special place. We can see a great many problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the coexistence in one country of people of different faiths and nationalities also presents many opportunities. Let us hope that the peaceful development of Bosnia and Herzegovina will continue, and that the country will find a place in the European Union.

Ewald Stadler (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I acknowledge that Ms Pack's report contains some important elements, including warnings against Islamic fundamentalism and Wahhabism. I also share the report's fundamental scepticism. Nevertheless, I have voted against the report because it is based on the wrong European Union policy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. We cannot turn the country into a single unified state from the outside. Many speakers have recognised that fact. I was surprised to hear statements of this kind from the Greens and the Liberals. Even the European Union cannot create a single unified state from the outside and, most importantly, it cannot make Bosnia and Herzegovina into a permanent protectorate of the EU. That is precisely what we are trying to do at the moment. Over the last 20 years, this country has not been able to establish the structures of a unified state. It is not even in a position to draw up a budget for 2012. It is not able to appoint directors of public agencies. Therefore, we cannot assume that this country will be capable of becoming a single unified state in the decades to come. The EU's policy is wrong and, therefore, I have voted against this report.

Written explanations of vote

Report: João Ferreira (A7-0447/2011)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this report because it is important to continue supporting the economies most affected by the economic crisis. This report explains well the need to increase the allocations from the European Fisheries Fund to Hungary, Romania, Latvia, Portugal, Greece and Ireland, as well as to others that may need to be bailed out in future. The Commission should retain this measure throughout the period in which these countries are in receipt of financial assistance.

Laima Liucija Andrikienė (PPE), *in writing.* – I voted in favour of this resolution concerning the additional measures for EFF programmes in order to facilitate the management of EU funding, to help accelerate investments in Member States and regions and to improve the availability of funding to the economy. The previously adopted measures under the 2008 regulation were not sufficient any more though the additional advance payments made to the Member States have provided an immediate cash injection of EUR 293 million, within the financial envelope agreed for each Member State for the 2007-2013 period. I agree with the Commission proposal to allow an increase in interim payments from the European Fisheries Fund by an amount corresponding to 10% above the actual cofinancing rate for each priority axis for the Member States which are facing serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability. This increase will not impose additional financial requirements on the overall budget but will facilitate the implementation of the programmes and will minimise the burden on the national budgets.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) The global economic and financial crisis has had a significant impact on European states. The citizens' income level has decreased considerably, while many others are faced with the unfortunate situation of losing their jobs at a time when the signals coming from the economic environment are not necessarily promising, and the creation of new jobs does not seem to accelerate. In these circumstances, I believe it is essential to provide European sectoral support to economies in difficulty.

Improving cooperation between European countries and authorities, alongside launching concrete actions to improve the absorption capacity of Member States may be one of the solutions that help overcome the effects of the economic and financial crisis. Sectoral financing, together with the possibility of ad hoc, temporary and limited derogation from European regulations, are suitable solutions to the challenges currently faced by EU citizens and economies. I voted in favour of this report.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) entered into force in January 2007. It aimed to improve the sector's competitiveness and help make it viable from an environmental, social and economic standpoint. To achieve this objective, it was granted a budget of EUR 3.8 billion for the period 2007-2013. However, some countries are experiencing difficulties and have been particularly affected by the sovereign debt crisis. Since it is the spirit of EU solidarity that makes Europe great, I have approved the Commission proposal to increase Union cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties, with a corresponding reduction in the national effort required in order to take up funding.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this report. As the financial and economic crisis continues, the Member States are applying budgetary constraints and reducing national budgets and, consequently, there is a risk that cohesion programmes will not be properly implemented on time. The implementation of these

programmes can have a positive impact on the Member States' recovery from the recession and their future economic and social development. This proposal is aimed at ensuring additional pre-financing for the European Fisheries Fund programmes for six Member States (Hungary, Romania, Latvia, Portugal, Greece and Ireland), which receive EU financial support under the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism and the Balance of Payments Mechanism. Given that this proposal will not have an impact on the EU budget because it is only the ceiling for pre-financing payments that is being increased and not the financial package envisaged for these Member States for fisheries fund programmes over the period 2007-2013, I welcome this proposal so that we can help these Member States overcome the financial crisis by guaranteeing the money required to support projects and economic recovery.

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for this report because I think that the measures being proposed in this document must be implemented as soon as possible. The prolonged economic crisis has increased the disparities in terms of productivity in the fisheries sector throughout the European Union. This is why I welcomed the funds being topped up to encourage investment, especially as part of regional projects. However, specific measures are required to facilitate rapid absorption of the funds provided by the Commission at national level.

My country is one of the beneficiaries of this fund, both for sea and inland fishing. Thanks to the report, the financial measures proposed in it will be applied retrospectively from 1 January 2010. The reduction in red tape brought about by these initiatives will encourage the modernisation of the fisheries sector and diversification of the activities carried out by the fishing communities.

Sergio Berlato (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The sustained financial and economic crisis has put increasing pressure on national financial resources. In this context, ensuring a smooth implementation of cohesion programmes takes on particular importance as a tool for injecting funds into the economy. Nonetheless, the liquidity problems resulting from budget constraints are making it difficult to implement the programmes, particularly in the Member States which have been most affected by the crisis. In order to ensure that the Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the Commission proposes to increase Community cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties, with a corresponding reduction in the national effort required in order to take up funding. I welcome the Commission's proposal, although I do share Mr Ferreira's concerns over some parts of it. The Commission should assess the extent to which this measure will indeed 'provide the Member States concerned with the funds necessary to support projects and the recovery of the economy'. Moreover, I think that the Commission needs to reconfigure the priorities of the EFF so that they are primarily focused on supporting productive activity and the development of coastal communities.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament report because alongside measures designed to encourage greater take-up of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) appropriations by the Member States, the priorities of the EFF itself also need to be reconfigured. Money from the fund should, above all, be focused on supporting productive activity, such as fleet renewal and modernisation, increased sustainability, improved selectivity of fishing gear and the development of coastal communities. The European Commission should assess the extent to which this measure will indeed provide the Member States concerned with the funds necessary to support

projects and revive the economy. It should be pointed out that, even under the new conditions, the restrictions on investment imposed by the so-called assistance programmes may still make it difficult to mobilise the national effort required. The Commission will therefore have to consider both the need to lift these restrictions on investment and the possibility of further reducing national cofinancing. The Commission proposal does not increase the budget available for each of the countries that are experiencing difficulties. The practical result of reducing the national effort will be that a comparatively lower overall amount of appropriations will be channelled into investment in the sector. The growth prospects opened up by the investment made will thus also be reduced. The cohesion principle itself is again being called into question, and the Commission should therefore look into the possibility of increasing the funds available to these countries.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The economic and financial crisis has had, and continues to have, an impact in different EU Member States. The Romanian fish market is small compared to EU countries, the total turnover of the sector being estimated at around EUR 40 million. Currently, there are around 340 000 fish farms and 48 trout farms in Romania. Private beneficiaries of funding from the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) were seriously affected by the credit crunch also in their country of origin, which led to a low rate of take-up of the available funding.

Alongside measures designed to encourage greater take-up of EFF appropriations by the Member States, I think the priorities of the EFF itself need to be reconfigured so that they are primarily focused on supporting productive activity and the development of coastal communities. For these reasons, I welcome the Commission's proposal to increase Community cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties, with a corresponding reduction in the national effort required in order to take up funding.

Alain Cadec (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I am pleased that Mr Ferreira's report was adopted at first reading. Indeed, the current economic environment made it necessary to reach a quick agreement on the crisis measures proposed by the Commission to address the lack of cofinancing by some Member States experiencing financial difficulties. I approve of the proposal to increase the maximum rate of cofinancing by ten percentage points. This is an additional guarantee of the European Fisheries Fund's successful implementation. This agreement shows that European solidarity means more than just words. It is important to remember that the new mechanisms put in place will have no impact on the next budgetary programming period.

Antonio Cancian (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the joint motion for a resolution amending Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) because I share its real sense of urgency, given the crisis that is gnawing away at the fisheries sector and, hence, the Member States involved.

I therefore find the Commission's proposal on this subject more than worthy of support. The measures included would genuinely accelerate Member States' investments in the affected regions, simplify the management of EU funding and increase the availability of funds for the economy. Another reason why I decided to vote in favour of the proposal is that, under the rules put forward, one of the plusses of the increase in EFF payments will be that it will not impose any burden on the general budget and will be applied to all future expenses incurred by the affected Member States.

Ergo, I wanted to declare my most sincere interest in the adoption of the reform on funding for the fisheries sector, which will certainly improve the current state of penury, in which

small-scale fishing businesses are hampered by the effects of the current economic crisis and current measures in this area.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) In 2008, the Council adopted a regulation, based on a Commission proposal, in response to the crisis and its socio-economic consequences. In the context of this package, the regulation provides for a series of legislative changes intended to provide additional pre-financing through payments advanced for European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes. The anticipated additional payments made to Member States will immediately inject EUR 293 million, as part of the funding agreed for the 2007-2013 period. The Commission believes there is now a need to take additional measures to facilitate the management of EU funds, so as to aid and accelerate investment in the Member States and regions and to improve the availability of finance for the economy, and is proposing an increase in intermediate payments from the EFF. This increase will not impose additional financial requirements on the overall budget, since the total financial allocation to the EFF for countries and programmes during the period at issue will not change. The amendments proposed by the rapporteur mean that this proposal will help the Member States to make better use of the EFF, so I am voting for this report.

Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) Although it is late in coming, I welcome the Commission's proposal on the European Fisheries Fund. Given the urgency of the matter, I think that its approval at first reading, in the form presented by the Commission, bodes well, in spite of the limitations it has.

Christine De Veyrac (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I voted in favour of this report recommending further assistance for fishing activities in those Member States experiencing serious economic difficulties, particularly south-west France, following the crisis. This temporary assistance should provide Member States with more resources with which to support their fishermen and safeguard their level of fish production.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for the report on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) because I am in favour of the European Commission's proposal to support the Member States most affected by the crisis, so as to enable the continuation of EFF programmes.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The Member States in serious financial difficulties, including Portugal, need particular help from the EU, in order for there to be a response to problems they are experiencing that is based not just on the determination of the affected peoples and governments, but on European cohesion and solidarity. To this end, and bearing in mind the particularly difficult and demanding situation of those Member States, the Commission has proposed amendments to Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006, intended to facilitate their access to funding. The urgent nature of this measure and the need for support that the Member States are demonstrating justify their immediate adoption. I hope that this support will be able to breathe new life into the sector.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This report, drafted by Mr Ferreira, concerns the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 on the European Fisheries Fund, as regards certain provisions relating to financial management for certain Member States experiencing or threatened with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability. The economic and financial crisis that we are experiencing has disproportionately hit coastal communities dedicated to fishing. Although I am convinced we could have gone

further, it is not possible to increase the available funds, so I agree with the 10% increase in cofinancing rates for countries in difficulties, as well as the other measures provided for. This is an instrument that, as well as improving the previous regulation in environmental terms, will help consolidate the regional economy and preserve fisheries resources. I therefore welcome the adoption of this report, since it constitutes an instrument for helping fishing communities that are undergoing periods of major difficulties and which are located in regions that benefit from convergence funding, thereby contributing to minimising the negative effects of the present economic and financial crisis.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) As with other EU funds such as the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF), this proposed amendment to the regulation on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) does not constitute proof of EU solidarity. It only constitutes a sign of flexibility; necessary, certainly, but too little too late. The Commission must therefore consider and respond to the reservations and suggestions that we set out in the report, in particular, those regarding the need to increase the funding available to the countries in question. In addition to measures facilitating increased take-up of EFF funds by Member States, the priorities of the EFF itself must be rethought, gearing it primarily towards support for the productive activity and development of coastal communities, for the rejuvenation of the sector, for employment and vocational training, and for the renovation and modernisation of the fleet and of the infrastructure that support the fishing industry. The amendments proposed by the Council under pressure from certain countries, such as Germany, which will eventually also be included in this report owing to the proposal by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), seem to us both superfluous and inappropriate. However, we believe that, in the present situation, it is urgent that this proposal be passed at first reading, despite its obvious limitations.

Carlo Fidanza (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the proposal because it increases Community cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties, with a corresponding reduction in the national effort required in order to take up funding. This whole issue is very important and today's vote finally takes stock of that fact. We must remember that the coastal communities most heavily dependent on fisheries have not escaped the current crisis, on top of which we must unfortunately consider the problems caused by years of decline and disintegration.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The global financial crisis and economic downturn have seriously damaged economic growth and financial stability, leading to a substantial deterioration in financial and economic conditions in several Member States. In spite of the actions that have already been taken to counterbalance the negative effects of the crisis, its impact on the real economy, labour market and citizens can still be clearly seen.

The aim of the submitted proposal is to provide increased support from the European Fisheries Fund to the Member States that have serious problems (or face the threat of such problems) relating, in particular, to economic growth and financial stability and to worsening deficits and debt. The proposal represents an attempt to help Member States in their efforts to overcome the financial crisis, and aims to provide the Member States affected with the resources necessary for supporting projects and economic recovery.

The current situation requires a rapid response to mitigate the negative impact not only on fisheries as such, but also on the economy as a whole, and I therefore believe that the regulation before us should enter into force as soon as possible and apply retroactively to

the period during which Member States received financial assistance from the EU or other euro area Member States, in order to address the serious difficulties concerning their financial stability.

Mikael Gustafsson (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (SV) I voted in favour of the report. However, I support the agreement reached at the UN conference on biological diversity (in October 2010 in Nagoya), which, among other things, established that all subsidies that threaten fish stocks and the environment should be abolished. The economic crisis in Europe was caused by the dysfunction of the euro and financial speculation. It is important that we abandon this neoliberal policy. I am, however, able to support short-term proposals involving the easing of the austerity policy in countries that are hard hit, provided this will not contribute to overfishing or have negative consequences for the environment.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this report because the global financial crisis and the unprecedented economic downturn have seriously damaged economic growth and financial stability and provoked a strong deterioration of financial and economic conditions in several Member States. Certain Member States are experiencing, or are threatened with, serious difficulties, notably, those connected with problems in terms of economic growth and financial stability and a deterioration in their deficit and debt position, due to the international economic and financial environment. Whilst important actions to counterbalance the negative effects of the crisis have already been taken, including amendments to the legislative framework, the impact of the financial crisis on the real economy, the labour market and citizens is being widely felt. The pressure on national financial resources is increasing and further steps should now be taken to alleviate that pressure through the maximum and optimal use of the funding from the European Fisheries Fund. This proposal is aimed at ensuring additional pre-financing for European Fisheries Fund programmes for Hungary, Romania, Latvia, Portugal, Greece and Ireland, which receive EU financial support under the European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism and the Balance of Payments Mechanism. It is also worth mentioning that this proposal will have no effect on the EU budget.

Philippe Juvin (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) In 2008, the Council adopted a regulation in response to the crisis and its socio-economic consequences. The Commission felt it was necessary to take further action to facilitate the management of Union funding, to help accelerate investments in Member States and regions, and to improve the availability of funding to the economy. Mr Ferreira's report supports the Commission's proposals. I voted in favour of this report during the vote in plenary.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) The sustained economic crisis is causing enormous disruption in many of the Member States, particularly in the implementation of EU cohesion programmes. The European Commission is proposing a 10% increase in cofinancing under the European Fisheries Fund, which will not affect the overall budget, because the allocation of funds from the European Development Fund will not change in this period.

The changes which have taken place in the fisheries sector during the crisis have principally affected coastal communities, where, for some time now, a fall in investment has been observable which has resulted in imbalances within the EU. Therefore, we need stronger targeting of the European Fisheries Fund than exists at present to support production and guarantee the development of local communities. The proposal to increase assistance for the countries with the greatest problems is very definitely worthy of support. The

Commission proposal does not, however, concern Regulation (EC) No 861/2006, which talks about financial measures for the implementation of the common fisheries policy, something which is surely crucial for the sustainable development of this sector.

Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) I endorsed this report. The European Fisheries Fund will help improve the availability of funding granted in this sector and ensure its sustainable use, and it is also intended to ensure better design of this funding. Poland wants to use the EFF to be able to modernise the sector and make good use of money which is awarded. I hope that with efficient administration, the fund will serve these purposes. Once again, by endorsing the report, I have expressed the conviction that the fund will not be used to close down Poland's Baltic fishing industry, but to contribute to its modernisation and development.

Kartika Tamara Liotard (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – I have voted in favour of this report. However, I support the agreement on biodiversity from the UN meeting held in Nagoya in October 2010, which stated that all subsidies that threaten fish stocks should be abolished. The economic crisis in Europe was created by the dysfunctionality of the euro and by financial speculation. It is important that those neoliberal policies are changed. I can support short-term proposals to ensure that austerity policies are eased in countries that are very badly affected, but only when this does not contribute to overfishing or negative environmental impacts.

Ramona Nicole Mănescu (ALDE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report on the European Fisheries Fund because I think it is important to have a sustainable fishing strategy and because any regulation amendment meant to facilitate rapid implementation of EU funded programmes will have an immediate and real impact on the economies of the Member States most affected by the crisis. With the financial and economic crisis increasingly reducing national financial resources, I believe it is vital to take appropriate measures to ensure a smooth implementation of operational programmes. Unfortunately, austerity measures imposed at national level had the immediate effect of significantly reducing the national cofinancing capacity, seriously affecting beneficiaries and citizens in the first instance and leading to a low rate of take-up of available funding.

Therefore, the Commission proposal is welcome because we need to help local, regional and national authorities to access as much of their share of European funding as possible. However, at the same time, the Commission should call upon national governments to submit regular reports on the use of this money, so as to make sure it is used most effectively.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this proposal. The Commission recognises that the sustained financial and economic crisis is increasing the pressure on national financial resources. In this context, it considers ensuring a smooth implementation of cohesion programmes to be of particular importance as a tool for injecting funds into the economy. Nonetheless, the liquidity problems resulting from budget constraints are making it difficult to implement the programmes, particularly in the Member States which have been most affected by the crisis. In order to ensure that these Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the Commission proposal contains provisions that would allow increased payments to be made to these countries for the period they are under the support mechanisms. This increase will not impose any additional financial burden on the overall budget.

Clemente Mastella (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) In order to ensure that Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, even at a time of financial crisis like the present, we believe that a top-up of ten percentage points should be applied to the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of the programmes for newly certified expenditure submitted during the period in question.

This increase will not involve additional financial costs on the EU budget, since the total financial allocation for the period from the EFF to the countries and the programmes in question will not change. This Commission proposal, to increase Community cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties, has long been necessary and comes unjustifiably late. Bearing in mind the urgency of the situation, we agree with the rapporteur that it should be adopted at first reading as it stands, notwithstanding a number of limitations that it presents.

Mario Mauro (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of the report by Mr Ferreira. The Commission proposal to increase Community cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties, with a corresponding reduction in the national effort required in order to take up funding, has long been a necessity for many people and I, like Mr Ferreira, fear it has come rather late. Accordingly, it should be approved with great urgency.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The sustained financial and economic crisis is increasing the pressure on national financial resources. In this context, I consider ensuring a smooth implementation of cohesion programmes to be of particular importance as a tool for injecting funds into the economy. Nonetheless, the liquidity problems resulting from budget constraints are making it difficult to implement the programmes, particularly in the Member States which have been most affected by the crisis. In order to ensure that these Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the Commission proposal contains provisions that would allow increased payments to be made to these countries for the period they are under the support mechanisms. More specifically, it is proposed that a top-up of ten percentage points will be applied to the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of the programmes for newly certified expenditure submitted during the period in question.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing.* – I agree if the objective is to help those Member States most affected by the financial crisis to continue their programmes on the ground funded by the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) so as to inject funds into the economy. To date, six countries have financial assistance under these mechanisms and have agreed with the Commission a macro-economic adjustment programme: Hungary, Romania, Latvia, Portugal, Greece and Ireland. These Member States (and indeed any other Member State which may be concerned in the future by such assistance programmes) should receive help to continue the implementation of the programmes funded by the EFF by increasing the sums allocated to the countries concerned for the period for which they are under the support mechanisms. In order to ensure that these Member States continue the implementation of the EFF programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the current proposal contains provisions that would allow the Commission to make increased payments to these countries, for the period they are under the support mechanisms. Bearing in mind that its approval is a matter of urgency, I am in favour.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The European Fisheries Fund (EFF) is the subsidy programme for fisheries policy in the EU. The goals of the EFF include promoting sustainable development in the fisheries industry, increasing the competitiveness of the businesses and establishing economically viable companies in the fisheries sector. It also aims to provide better protection for the environment. One important objective is to put an end to overfishing in many European waters and secure the future of the European fisheries industry. Around EUR 3.9 billion in funding is available for the period from 2007 to 2013. Almost EUR 3 billion of this is destined for areas with below-average economic growth. The remaining funding will be distributed across the other EU Member States, together with a small amount which will be administered directly by the European Commission. I did not vote in favour of the report because, as the rapporteur noted, the Commission should, first of all, determine to what extent funding must be made available to support projects and stimulate economic recovery. In addition, there is a concern that the money could be distributed unfairly.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I voted in favour of this report to lend my support to the proposal made by the Commission, which now feels it necessary to take further action to facilitate the management of Union funding, to help accelerate investments in Member States and regions, and to improve the availability of funding to the economy. Above all, however, the Commission proposes increasing interim payments from the European Fisheries Fund by an amount corresponding to ten percentage points above the actual cofinancing rate for each priority axis for Member States which are facing serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability. This is another response to the economic and social consequences of the crisis, in addition to that of the Council in 2008, which led to the adoption of a Council decision granting assistance to a Member State through support mechanisms.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE), *in writing.* – (LT) Historically, fisheries policy is one of the most important EU policies. It is therefore to be welcomed that the European Commission is taking the implementation and funding of this policy seriously. As certain EU Member States face economic difficulties, it is important to ensure that the funding of the common fisheries policy does not suffer as a result. In particular, given the fact that in the new financial programming period, we will move towards common fisheries policy sustainability and stock conservation, it is important for the sector itself to be protected and ready for change.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted in favour of the report, which allows for the implementation of an important Commission proposal to unblock the use of European funds in the fishing industry. Due to the lack of liquidity it has generated, the financial crisis has caused additional difficulties in securing cofinancing in some Member States. This is the most important obstacle to effective use of all types of European funding, along with the impossibility of ensuring, in many cases, private cofinancing of investments.

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) According to the Commission proposal, the budget available for each of the countries that are experiencing difficulties in the area of fisheries policy will not be increased. The consequence is that, because of the smaller national contribution, an even lower overall amount will be invested in the fisheries industry. The cohesion principle itself is being called into question and, therefore, the Commission should look into the possibility of increasing the funds available to those countries with problems. The rules on clearing public account deficits should separate investment spending from other public spending. Investment should not be included in the calculations in order

to prevent budgetary consolidation from taking priority over economic growth. Subsidies for projects to promote economic growth in the industry are urgently needed. Until these are made available, the consolidation process cannot be stabilised and, therefore, I have voted against the report.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcome this resolution, which proposes increasing assistance from the European Fisheries Fund by ten percentage points for Member States facing financial difficulties. Attention is drawn to the fact that the economic and financial crisis has manifested itself in different ways in different Member States and will continue to do so. Consequently, it is appropriate for those countries hit particularly hard by the crisis to be allocated greater payments so that they can continue to implement European Fisheries Fund programmes without interruption. It should be noted that increased payments would only be paid for a certain period until the country overcomes specific difficulties.

Aldo Patriciello (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) In order to ensure that the Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the Commission proposal contains provisions that would allow increased payments to be made to these countries for the period they are under the support mechanisms. This increase will not impose any additional financial burden on the overall budget, since the total financial allocation for the period from the EFF to the countries and the programmes in question will not change. Accordingly, I am voting in favour of the proposal.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The present economic and financial crisis means that increased EU cofinancing for the countries facing the worst difficulties, with the corresponding reduction in national contributions in order to be able to make use of funds, has been urgently needed for a long time. The coastal communities most dependent on fishing are therefore facing a difficult situation, which results in both a lack of capacity for private investment, particularly by small and medium-sized enterprises, and a lack of public investment. As such, I welcome the Commission proposal, since it ensures that these Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund programmes and provides for the possibility of increasing payments to be made to the countries facing greatest difficulties. I voted in favour for these reasons.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – In favour. The Commission recognises that the sustained financial and economic crisis is increasing the pressure on national financial resources. In this context, it considers ensuring the smooth implementation of cohesion programmes to be of particular importance as a tool for injecting funds into the economy. Nonetheless, the liquidity problems resulting from budget constraints are making it difficult to implement the programmes, particularly in the Member States which have been most affected by the crisis. In order to ensure that these Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the Commission proposal contains provisions that would allow increased payments to be made to these countries for the period they are under the support mechanisms. More specifically, it is proposed that a top-up of ten percentage points will be applied to the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of the programmes for newly certified expenditure submitted during the period in question. In applying the top-up, the cofinancing rate of the programme cannot exceed by more than ten percentage points the maximum ceilings set in Article 53(3) of the EFF Regulation (75% and 50% respectively for eligible and non-eligible regions under the Convergence Objective).

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of this text because I am convinced of the importance of the Commission's proposal to increase Community cofinancing for the countries facing the greatest difficulties on this front. The sustained financial and economic crisis is actually increasing the pressure on national financial resources. In order to ensure that the Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund, we need to increase the payments to be made to these countries for the period they are under the support mechanisms.

Kārlis Šadurskis (PPE), *in writing.* – (LV) The sustained financial and economic crisis in Europe has greatly increased the pressure on national financial resources and has limited the injection of funds into the economy with the aid of cohesion programmes. The proposal, which has been adopted as a matter of urgency, for a regulation on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) as regards financial management for certain Member States experiencing serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability, will enable the European Commission to make increased payments to, for example, Ireland, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Greece, for the period they are under the support mechanisms. This temporary top-up will amount to 10% of the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of EFF programmes. This proposal drew considerable support from the European Parliament, including my vote, regardless of the deficiencies to which Parliament drew the European Commission's attention.

Nikolaos Salavrakos (EFD), *in writing.* – (EL) I voted in favour of Mr Ferreira's report because I consider that, as a result of the economic and credit crisis in Europe, we need to speed up and facilitate funding by the European Fisheries Fund, especially for the economically weaker countries which have been hard hit by the crisis. We need to help in this direction for the sake of growth and jobs in this sector.

Matteo Salvini (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of these amendments to the European Fisheries Fund. The measure will involve no cost to the EU because the funds advanced to Member States in economic difficulties will be offset before the end of the programme. It is right to pay these funds in advance because otherwise, countries that have suffered more than others in the economic crisis will not be able to implement the projects for funding a delicate area like the fishing industry. It is a rightful act of solidarity.

Antolín Sánchez Presedo (S&D), *in writing.* – (ES) The economic crisis and budgetary restrictions are having an impact on the European Fisheries Fund, particularly in those Member States with macro-economic adjustment programmes: Hungary, Romania, Latvia, Portugal, Greece and Ireland. The third report on the EFF (2009) noted that austerity measures had constrained national cofinancing and the credit crunch had affected private beneficiaries, reducing their ability to access and use these funds, and compromising the aims of cohesion. I support the amendment to Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 so that, while such support mechanisms exist, the Commission can address increases in payments to the affected countries. For newly certified expenditure submitted during the period in question, it is proposed that a top-up of ten percentage points will be applied to the priority axis of the programmes, with no increase in the total financial allocation. The new cofinancing conditions of 15% and 40% respectively for eligible and non-eligible regions under the Convergence Objective could, however, present an obstacle to this mobilisation. We need to consider whether it needs to be reduced further. Furthermore, it would be appropriate to reconfigure the possibilities of the EFF itself and incorporate the financial instrument established in Regulation (EC) No 861/2006.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The sustained financial and economic crisis is exercising increasing pressure on national financial resources, in different ways depending on the Member State. Particularly over the past decade, we have seen an accentuation of the disparities and imbalances within the EU: the consequences of these imbalances take many forms. One is the capacity to access and utilise Community funds. Bearing this in mind, the priorities of the European Fisheries Fund need to be reconfigured so that they are primarily focused on supporting productive activity – such as fleet renewal and modernisation, increased sustainability, improved selectivity of fishing gear, and engine replacement – and the development of coastal communities. This vote therefore provides a stimulus for the implementation of the common fisheries policy and in the area of the Law of the Sea.

Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (DA) I voted in favour of the report, but I support the biodiversity agreement reached at the UN summit in Nagoya in October 2010, which declared that all subsidy arrangements which threaten fish stocks should be abolished. The economic crisis in the EU is a result of financial speculation and the inherently defective way in which the euro was set up. It is important that this policy is amended. I am, however, able to support interim proposals that will ensure that the consequences of austerity policies are alleviated in countries that have been hard hit, but only if this does not contribute to overfishing or have a negative impact on the environment.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) In order to ensure that the Member States continue the implementation of the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) programmes on the ground and disburse funds to projects, the Commission has proposed provisions that would allow increased payments to be made to these countries relating to their financial stability for the period they are under the support mechanisms. It is therefore proposed that a top-up of ten percentage points will be applied to the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of the programmes for newly certified expenditure submitted during the period in question. This increase will not lead to additional financial burdens on the overall budget, since the total financial allocation to the EFF for the countries in question during the period at issue will not be changed. Since I consider this measure important and urgently needed, I voted for Parliament's position, which results from the amendments tabled by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), to which I belong.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted for the proposal for a regulation on the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) as regards certain provisions relating to financial management for certain Member States experiencing or threatened with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability. The pressure that national financial resources are exposed to is increasing all the time, necessitating additional measures to ease this pressure, by making the best and maximum use of EFF funding. I voted for the proposal to increase EU cofinancing for the countries facing financial difficulties, with a corresponding reduction in the national contribution required in order to use the funds during the period when these Member States (Ireland, Hungary, Latvia, Portugal and Romania) benefit from the support mechanisms to guarantee that they will continue to implement the EFF programmes.

The regulation proposes a 10% top-up of the cofinancing rates applicable to the priority axis of the programmes for newly certified expenditure submitted during the period in question. In applying the top-up, the programme's cofinancing rate cannot exceed the maximum ceilings set in Article 53(3) of the EFF Regulation by more than ten percentage

points (75% and 50% for eligible and non-eligible regions respectively under the Convergence Objective).

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing*. – The report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 1198/2006 on the European Fisheries Fund points out that some elements are missing from the proposal. Even if more funds are to be allocated, a more precise and detailed proposal should be presented. Neither the report nor the proposal specifies the source of the financial support for the continuation of cohesion programmes. As the rapporteur calls for more details to be added to the Commission's proposal, I have voted in favour of this report.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) We agree with the measures proposed in the report: greater take-up of European Fisheries Fund (EFF) appropriations by the Member States; reconfiguration of the priorities of the EFF itself, so that they are primarily focused on supporting productive activity and the development of coastal communities; support for bringing young people back into the sector, and for jobs and professional training; and renewal and modernisation of the fleet and of support infrastructure for fishing. Despite some of the report's limitations, we believe the measures therein to be urgently needed and conclusive, so we voted in favour.

Report: Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (A7-0025/2012)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) The proposed solution to the dispute on hormones in beef is in line with the thinking of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, since it enables the suspension of sanctions on European Union products, whilst guaranteeing that meat imported into the European Union meets European standards. This solution is beneficial to European meat producers, who can produce high-quality meat without unfair competition, whilst also increasing their potential market.

Laima Liucija Andrikienė (PPE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this proposal to amend an existing European Parliament and Council regulation opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef from the United States and Canada. It will implement the steps set out in the Memoranda of Understanding signed with the US and Canada regarding the importation of Beef from Animals Not Treated with Certain Growth-Promoting Hormones and Increased Duties Applied to Certain Products of the European Communities. The EU will progressively increase to a total of 48 200 tonnes the tariff-rate quota for high-quality beef not treated with growth hormones, and the US and Canada will adequately reduce or suspend sanctions on EU products. I support the position that the settlement of the dispute will guarantee that beef imports will be in line with EU requirements.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) As you know, the export of European veal and beef to the United States was banned for a decade due to US restrictions relating to BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy). The United States has suspended sanctions on some EU products and the European Union is offering significant access to its market for hormone-free beef. We have finally put an end to this dispute. This agreement makes it possible for the Union to keep its ban on hormone-treated beef, in exchange for increased import quotas for high-quality beef from the United States and Canada. As Ms Le Brun and Ms Saïfi of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) said, 'This is a

victory for European diplomacy but, above all, a victory for European consumers. The United States and Canada failed to impose hormone-treated beef on Europeans, who did not want it. Sanctions were not enough to make us change our mind'.

Liam Aylward (ALDE), *in writing*. – I welcome the resolution of the long running trade dispute between the USA and the EU on access for USA and Canadian beef to the EU market. However, I am disappointed that no efforts were made with this Memorandum of Understanding to introduce some reciprocity to the deal. The imminent publication of the US BSE rule, as announced at the weekend, is a significant show of good faith on the part of the US authorities. However, this is the start of a long process, and the EU must ensure that this is not used as a delaying tactic and that all market opportunities are secured for European farmers. As the USA now has the same OIE BSE status as Ireland, the reasons behind the original ban have been eliminated. At present, only 1% of Irish beef is exported to non-EU markets. Given the importance of agriculture to the European economy, we cannot afford not to push for access to large markets such as the USA, and we should take every opportunity for reciprocal deals for our farmers.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this report. The dispute between the EU and the US and Canada over the EU ban on beef imports, where the cattle have been fed growth-promoting hormones, has lasted for more than two decades and is having a negative impact on EU producers. Following the ban on imports of such beef into the EU, the US and Canada began to impose trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from the EU, such as beef and pork products, cheese, chocolate, juice, etc., and EU producers have consequently lost a significant share of the market, respectively worth USD 116.8 million and CAD 11.3 million a year. In 2009, during bilateral negotiations, an agreement was reached on the gradual lifting of sanctions imposed on EU agricultural products by the US and Canada, in exchange for an autonomous, zero-duty, tariff-rate quota for high-quality beef not treated with hormones. I welcome this proposal increasing US and Canadian quotas for high-quality beef and dismantling barriers to give EU producers access to the markets in these countries.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament report because the final settlement of the beef hormone dispute should create further momentum towards greater economic and commercial integration between the EU and the US and Canada. Notwithstanding possible differences in opinion, the aim should always be to reach a compromise rather than disrupt bilateral trade. By further dismantling trade barriers with its major trading partners, the European Union is demonstrating its commitment to strengthening this long-standing economic relationship in terms of trade. The Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and their implementation therefore clearly constitute a win-win situation for the trading partners on both sides of the Atlantic. As the US and Canada have already suspended all retaliatory sanctions in the course of 2011, failure to honour the deal on the European side could have very negative political consequences and would damage the transatlantic trade relationship. The conclusion of the legislative procedure will permit the EU to comply with commitments undertaken towards resolving the dispute. Naturally, the Memorandum of Understanding ensures that all beef products shipped under this quota will continue to comply with stringent food safety requirements set out in EU legislation. In particular, doors will not be opened to hormone-treated beef from the US or Canada, or from any other country.

Vito Bonsignore (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I approve the report on amending Council Regulation (EC) No 617/2009 opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of

high-quality beef from North America. The political value of this measure is of primary importance. It not only puts an end to a tariff war which began with the mad cow scare in the 1990s; it also makes an important contribution to the integration of transatlantic markets, maintaining the EU's commitment to a rigorous consumer protection and food safety policy.

The expected benefits of the measure reach beyond the calculations presented in the report, due to the well-known interdependence of the markets and market sectors, exceeding the impact of the quota on the specific sector several times over. Furthermore, it is important not to underestimate the significance of the measure as a sign of the effectiveness and dynamism of the institutions, including by putting in place concrete measures to tackle recurring isolationist and insular pressures which, as the crisis continues, may sometimes seem to be attractive placebo solutions for economies and societies riven by tensions and widespread difficulties.

Philippe Boulland (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Twenty years of commercial disputes between the EU and North America have come to an end. During this beef hormone war, the WTO condemned the European Union for always refusing to give up its principles, claiming that European consumers could be mistaken about the quality of the imported meat. This agreement makes it possible for the sanctions to be definitively lifted, in exchange for import quotas for guaranteed hormone-free, high-quality beef from the United States and Canada. This solution should satisfy farmers and consumers, both European and North American, and rewards the EU's dedication to ensuring high-quality food for its citizens.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The purpose of the proposal is to amend a proposal for a regulation opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef originating in the United States and Canada, so as to bring an end to the long transatlantic dispute on beef hormones. The proposal for a regulation implements the measures provided for in the Memoranda of Understanding signed with the US and Canada regarding imports of meat from animals not treated with certain growth-promoting hormones. The solution to the trade dispute consists of the EU progressively increasing the tariff quota for high-quality beef that has not been treated with growth hormones, while the US and Canada will progressively reduce or suspend sanctions on products coming from the EU. I am voting for this report, since the adoption of this regulation by the European Parliament and the Council will be of mutual benefit, will strengthen transatlantic trade links, and will re-establish confidence by improving market access on both sides of the Atlantic.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the Commission's proposal on opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef. I have followed this proposal for a regulation closely as shadow rapporteur for my political group, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. I think that it is beneficial to reach a Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and US and between the EU and Canada regarding beef imports. At the same time, the European Union must remain vigilant and defend European consumers' rights. This is why the European executive must suspend the annual tariff quota if the agreement is not implemented or maintained by the US or Canada. We must be certain that hormone-treated beef imports do not enter the European market.

Christine De Veyrac (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I supported this text, which will put an end to the trade dispute that has affected the cross-Atlantic export of products from our land

since 1998. The compromise proposed here makes it possible to maintain European health protection requirements, while opening the door to a resurgence of exports of our artisanal products. This is good news for high-quality products.

Anne Delvaux (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) In 1988, Europe banned the import of beef from animals treated with growth hormones. In 1999, in retaliation, the United States and Canada, with the approval of the WTO, imposed duties on several European products (such as chocolate). Today, the European Parliament has adopted a regulation increasing by 20 000 tonnes (to 48 200 tonnes) the annual Union import tariff quota for high-quality beef from the United States and Canada, from cattle not treated with growth hormones. This agreement makes it possible for the Union to keep its ban on hormone-treated beef, in exchange for increased import quotas for high-quality beef from the United States and Canada and the suspension of sanctions against some European products. This is therefore a crucial step towards ending a dispute that has lasted more than a decade. I welcome this move, which is a victory for European diplomacy but, above all, a victory for European consumers. The United States and Canada failed to impose hormone-treated beef on Europeans, who did not want it.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for the report on ‘an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef’, since it includes proposals to bring an end to the disagreement between the EU and US, and to suspend the sanctions imposed on products originating in the EU, whilst guaranteeing that beef imports will meet the EU’s strict standards.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The conflict between the European Union and the United States and Canada on hormone-treated beef demonstrates that two trading blocs with similar standards and concerns regarding food quality and safety can have lasting disagreements that are counterproductive for both. The length of this conflict and the robustness of the sanctions adopted demonstrate that there is benefit in seeking a negotiated solution before taking stances that are too extreme. The unilateral suspension of the sanctions applied to the European Union by the United States and Canada constitutes a positive signal, worthy of a suitable response with the adoption by the EU of an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef. That said, I believe that the EU should not yield while it believes the safety of its citizens to be at risk and should seek to raise awareness amongst its partners of the need for them to adopt procedures and types of consumer information enabling them to be adequately and fully informed about the nature of the products that they consume. I want the European Union and the two North American countries to continue their efforts to integrate increasingly their economies, which would benefit companies and consumers greatly.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) For more than 20 years, the European Union, on one side, and the United States and Canada, on the other, have been in dispute over beef hormones, which has negatively affected transatlantic trade relations. The US and Canada responded to the EU’s ban on imports of beef and beef products treated with certain growth-promoting hormones for reasons of consumer protection and food safety, due to the need to protect consumers in food-safety terms, by imposing customs duties on various European products. The aforementioned dispute has been brought to a conclusion with the adoption of the report drafted by Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl and the consequent passing of the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 617/2009 opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef. As such, and in view of the opinion of the Committee

on International Trade and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, I voted for this report, which not only deepens transatlantic trade relations, but also suspends all sanctions against the EU imposed on European products in trade terms.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The basis of this report is the dispute over the ban, for good reasons of consumer protection and food safety, on imports of beef from the United States and Canada which had been treated with certain growth-promoting hormones. In order to end the dispute, an agreement has been reached which provides for a gradual lifting of the sanctions imposed by the US and Canada on EU agricultural products in exchange for an autonomous zero-duty tariff quota for high-quality beef not treated with hormones. This opening up of the European market to hormone-free beef, which may have positive consequences for the export of various EU products, such as beef and pork products, thereby benefiting the major exporting countries, is due, above all, to economic and commercial pressure and threats from the US and Canada. The sanctions imposed on European products are clear evidence of this. In addition to our ongoing concern as to the quality and safety of meat from the US and Canada, bearing in mind what is known about the intensive and very intensive production methods used in those countries, we also have reservations about the effect of the tariff quota on production in countries like Portugal.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) A dispute over beef treated with hormones adversely affected transatlantic trade relations in the area of agricultural products for more than two decades. In 1988, for reasons of consumer protection and food safety, the EU banned imports of beef and meat products that had been treated with certain growth hormones. Although the dispute over beef treated with hormones concerned a relatively small volume of trade, it led to a reduction in trade and had significant consequences on both sides of the Atlantic. Close trading partners entered into a long-running trade dispute. Continued application of retaliatory tariffs on certain European products hampered exports and EU producers subsequently suffered a loss of market share.

Through bilateral negotiations between the EU, the USA and Canada, however, a pragmatic way was eventually found of avoiding the destructive dynamics of trade sanctions. The negotiations have resulted in 'Memoranda of Understanding' that will see the gradual lifting of sanctions imposed on EU agricultural products by the USA and Canada, in exchange for an autonomous, zero-duty, tariff-rate quota for high-quality beef not treated with hormones. The Memoranda of Understanding and their application clearly create a situation that is mutually beneficial to the trade partners. I firmly believe that the rapid and smooth adoption of the submitted regulation will help to restore and strengthen mutual trust and overcome the existing differences in transatlantic trade relations in this sector.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) The long-standing controversy over meat products treated with growth-promoting hormones has, over the last 20 years, both damaged the parties involved and caused a significant drop in European exports. This agreement aims to resolve the problem gradually, enabling the retaliatory sanctions imposed by Canada and the United States to be lifted. This will have just a 0.36% negative effect on the European beef products market, while providing economic benefits for various Member States, including Italy. Since the other party has already met its obligations during 2011, I voted in favour.

Mikael Gustafsson (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (SV) I abstained in the vote on this report. I believe that the EU's decision in 1988 to ban imports of beef that had been treated with

growth-promoting hormones was absolutely right. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute settlement system ruled in 1996 that the United States and Canada should have the right to impose trade sanctions against the EU on a number of products as a legitimate response to the EU's decision. This did indeed happen and it led to a dispute resolution process and a Memorandum of Understanding. I believe that the WTO's original ruling against the EU was based on a free trade principle that fails to take into consideration either environmental or social consequences. This entire so-called dispute settlement system is therefore absurd and I thus choose to abstain.

Brice Hortefeux (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I welcome the adoption of this report on imports of high-quality beef, which puts an end to a trade dispute with the United States and Canada that has lasted more than 20 years. The agreement reached will make it possible to increase imports of high-quality beef from North America while keeping the embargo on hormone-treated beef. This increase should correspond to only 0.36% of the total EU beef and veal market, which constitutes a limited competitive risk to our farmers. This is a happy outcome for trade relations between our two continents, which I wholeheartedly welcome. Indeed, thanks to this agreement, the United States and Canada plan to lift duties that have been imposed since 1999 on our products, including Roquefort cheese, fresh truffles, mustard and chocolate.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcomed this document because although the conflict over hormone-treated beef involved a relatively small amount of trade, it led to a reduction in trade and had significant repercussions on both sides of the Atlantic. The United States and Canada were authorised to impose trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from the EU. Close trading partners got entrenched in a lengthy and unconstructive trade dispute. The Memorandum of Understanding with the United States and the Memorandum of Understanding with Canada provide for three-phased arrangements, which gradually abolish the sanctions imposed by the United States and Canada on certain Union products. The agreement provides for the gradual lifting of sanctions imposed on EU agricultural products by the US and Canada, in exchange for an autonomous, zero-duty, tariff-rate quota for high-quality beef not treated with hormones. The quick and smooth adoption of the present regulation will help to re-build and strengthen good faith and bridge existing gaps in transatlantic trade relations in this sector. The final settlement of the beef hormone dispute should create further momentum towards greater economic and commercial integration between the EU and the US and Canada. Notwithstanding possible differences in opinion, the aim should always be to reach a compromise rather than disrupt bilateral trade. By further dismantling trade barriers with its major trading partners, the EU is demonstrating its commitment to strengthening this long-standing economic relationship in terms of trade.

Peter Jahr (PPE), *in writing.* – (DE) The decision today to increase the import tariff quota for beef brings an end at last to a long trade dispute. From April onwards, beef from the US and Canada can be imported into Europe, provided that it has not been treated with hormones. I welcome this decision because it ends a long-standing conflict and, at the same time, ensures that no hormone-treated meat can be imported into Europe. As the US and Canada are lifting their trade restrictions in return, from an overall perspective, this is a successful solution.

Philippe Juvin (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I supported this report amending a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef. By adopting this report, we have put an end to a trade dispute

with the United States and Canada that has lasted more than 20 years. This report will oblige the European Union to increase imports of high-quality beef in exchange for keeping its ban on hormone-treated beef.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing.* – (DE) I welcome the fact that the European Parliament has agreed to continue the ban on imports of hormone-treated beef into the EU and, at the same time, to introduce higher tariff quotas for high-quality beef from the US and Canada. Adopting this report brings an end to a trade dispute between the EU and the US that has had a negative impact on many areas of foreign trade and caused great damage. We are now in a position that ensures the safety of European consumers and exporters. This report results in a clear win-win situation. The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has spoken out in favour of the report in its statement. I would like to make it clear how important it is to put an end to trade disputes and to devote our energies to other tasks. The European Union must focus on competitiveness, innovation and growth. Trade disputes do not help us in these areas.

Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (FR) The report that is being put to the vote has come about because we are giving in to blackmail by the US and Canadian authorities. While the European Union has legitimately put in place measures to ban imports of hormone-treated meat, the United States and Canada have used this to their advantage to put in place trade retaliation measures which have hit several European agricultural sectors.

With this agreement that we are being urged to ratify in the name of returning to normality for the benefit of these sectors, beef production will be put under pressure from competition by substantially increasing import quotas without tariffs. That is why I voted against this text, which gives in to blackmail that is harmful for our agriculture.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted for this proposal. The dispute concerning beef hormones negatively affected transatlantic trade relations in agricultural products for more than two decades. In 1988, the EU banned imports of beef and beef products treated with certain growth-promoting hormones for reasons of consumer protection and food safety. In 1996, the United States and Canada challenged the ban in the WTO dispute settlement system and were subsequently authorised to impose trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from the EU. Since 1999, the US and Canada have imposed retaliatory tariffs on a wide range of European products, respectively worth USD 116.8 million and CAD 11.3 million a year.

Mario Mauro (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The regulation in question must be adopted as quickly as possible. Now, particularly in the light of the recent disputes, we need to strengthen good faith and bridge the gap that exists in this area of transatlantic trade relations. I voted in favour.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE), *in writing.* – The decision of the US authorities to publish a draft law aimed at aligning its rules on bovine imports with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) standards on BSE is a welcome one and could pave the way for the reopening of the market for EU beef to the US. While this move is not directly linked with the report voted today in plenary, it nevertheless demonstrates the goodwill of the US. For this reason, I supported this report.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The dispute on beef hormones negatively affected transatlantic trade relations in agricultural products for more than two decades. In 1988, the EU banned imports of beef and beef products treated with certain growth-promoting

hormones, for reasons of consumer protection and food safety. In 1996, the United States and Canada challenged the ban in the World Trade Organisation dispute settlement system and were subsequently authorised to impose trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from the EU. Since 1999, the US and Canada have imposed retaliatory tariffs on a wide range of European products, respectively worth USD 116.8 million and CAD 11.3 million a year. It should be stressed that the final settlement of the beef hormone dispute should create further momentum towards greater economic and commercial integration between the EU, on the one side, and the US and Canada, on the other. The adoption of this regulation by the European Parliament and the Council will lead to mutual benefits, will strengthen transatlantic trade links, and will rebuild confidence by improving market access.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – The proposed solution for the long-standing beef hormones dispute is in line with the request of the Parliament about finding a satisfactory settlement of this dispute. It allows for the suspension of the sanctions on EU products, while guaranteeing that beef imports to the EU will be in line with EU requirements. I totally support the rapporteur.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) The United States and Canada are important trading partners of the EU. Nevertheless, there are definitely some products from these countries that violate European health directives and, consequently, are not imported into the EU. This includes beef that has been treated with growth-promoting hormones. In order to protect consumers, the EU banned the import of this meat, whereupon Canada and the United States imposed trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from the EU. This conflict caused a reduction in trade. Following lengthy negotiations, the sanctions imposed by the US and Canada were gradually lifted and a zero-duty tariff quota for high-quality beef not treated with hormones was introduced. The tariff quota is now to be increased, as a result of which Canada and the US have, in return, suspended their retaliatory sanctions. I abstained from the vote, as it is not clear from the report whether a further increase in the tariff quota could not be detrimental to the European meat industry.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I decided to vote in favour of this report regulating high-quality beef imports. Let us not forget, the dispute on beef hormones negatively affected transatlantic trade relations in agricultural products for more than two decades. In 1988, the EU banned imports of beef and beef products from animals treated with certain growth-promoting hormones for reasons of consumer protection and food safety. In 1996, the United States and Canada challenged the ban through the WTO dispute settlement system and were subsequently authorised to impose trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from the EU. Since 1999, the US and Canada have imposed retaliatory duties on a wide range of European products. This proposal sets out memoranda that I consider to be decisive and which will be implemented in several phases in order to meet US and Canadian criteria. There will certainly be a limited impact on the European market, but a failure to adopt this regulation would run the risk of new trade sanctions against our Union.

Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report, taking into account the obligation imposed on exporters in the United States and Canada not to treat with hormones the cattle whose meat they want to sell on the European market. In the interest of consumers, but also in order to enhance the competitiveness of European agriculture, I support free trade, but only provided that exporters in partner countries are bound by the same high quality, environmental and food safety conditions with which

European producers comply. This principle should be considered upon conclusion of any trade agreement and with regard to all aspects of European agricultural and environmental legislation.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution because establishing an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef is part of the compromise reached between the EU and the US over the beef hormone dispute. It should be noted that this is an appropriate means of improving and developing trade relations between the US and the EU and excellent proof of how the EU is ready to improve dispute settlement resolutions in the WTO, by embracing a more pragmatic, more efficient and less politically damaging way forward on difficult issues.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this report on the EU-US agreement because it enables the US blockade on European exports such as mineral water, pork, canned and prepared fruits, chocolate, juices, oats, chewing gum, jams, Roquefort cheese and fresh truffles to be lifted. A very important aspect of this report is that it encourages the production of European beef for export, thereby contributing significantly to the agricultural sector whilst protecting consumers, since imports of US beef will be increased without recourse to beef produced using hormones. The United States gave their support to completely suspending the sanctions against the EU in May 2011, provided that we honour our side of the agreement in a timely manner. If the European Union does not reciprocally implement the agreement, we run the risk of additional retaliatory measures from the United States, which will have to be compensated for damages incurred by the failure to comply with World Trade Organisation rules.

Aldo Patriciello (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The conflict over hormone-treated beef has led to trade reduction and had significant repercussions on both sides of the Atlantic, with close trading partners getting entrenched in a lengthy and unconstructive trade dispute. As a result, I would like to declare my vote in favour of the adoption of this regulation by the European Parliament and the Council. It will lead to mutual benefits, will strengthen transatlantic trade links, and will build confidence by improving market access on both sides of the Atlantic.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) This commitment made by the EU, the United States and Canada provides for the gradual raising of sanctions imposed on EU agricultural products by the US and Canada, in exchange for an autonomous tariff quota, exempt from duties, for high-quality beef that has not been hormone treated. This is an agreement that will contribute to strengthening transatlantic trade links and to rebuilding confidence by improving market access on both sides of the Atlantic. I therefore voted for this report.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) This afternoon, we have voted in favour of the report on an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef. While the jargon may be slightly evocative at first glance, it is essential in that it – finally – puts an end to the war on hormone-treated beef. This will come as a relief to European consumers, farmers and distributors, putting an end to 20 years of trade disputes between the old and new continent. Condemned by the World Trade Organisation for refusing to import hormone-treated beef from the United States and Canada, and subjected to trade retaliation measures costing millions of euro each year, the European Union has always refused to abandon its principles, believing that European consumers should not be misled about the quality of imported meat.

Thanks to this agreement, the sanctions will be lifted once and for all in exchange for import quotas for guaranteed hormone-free, high-quality US and Canadian beef. This is a win-win solution for both European and US farmers and consumers and will remove hormone-treated beef from our plates for good.

Crescenzo Rivellini (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Today, during the plenary session, we voted on the report by Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl, which put an end to the dispute with the United States and Canada on the sale of hormone-treated meat that has been going on for 20 years. The agreement will increase the European Union import tariff quota to 48 200 tonnes. In return, the United States and Canada have already suspended the retaliatory sanctions applied to products originating from 26 Member States (except the United Kingdom) amounting to over USD 250 million in current trade terms. One of the main beneficiaries that stands to gain from the lifting of sanctions is Italy, with over USD 99 million worth of trade. The resolution will lead to mutual benefits. Parliament has taken a step that will allow the European agricultural industry to plan for the future once again and will strengthen transatlantic trade links.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – In favour. For Greens, the important point is that the EU has managed to maintain its own food standards and keep the EU market free from imports of hormone-treated beef. All beef shipped in from the US and Canada under this quota will need to comply with the stringent food safety requirements set out in the EU legislation. It is also a victory with regard to the (often) perceived pre-eminence of WTO rulings: it shows that you can apply your standards even in the face of WTO rulings.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of this text because I think it will help strengthen good faith between the European Union, on one side, and the United States and Canada, on the other, bridging existing gaps in transatlantic trade relations in this sector. The conclusion of this agreement will permit the EU to comply with commitments undertaken towards resolving the dispute over hormone-treated beef, providing further momentum towards greater economic and commercial integration.

Oreste Rossi (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) This report ends the dispute between the EU and the US over the application of retaliatory measures brought in by the US and Canada on agricultural products from Europe, following the EU's decision, which I wholeheartedly support, to ban imports of meat containing prohibited hormones into the EU. The US and Canada had applied heavy duties to a number of agricultural products and derivatives from the EU, causing serious economic damage to our producers. Thanks to mediation by the Commission, a Memorandum of Understanding that resolves the long-running dispute, while maintaining the ban on importing meat treated with prohibited hormones into Europe, has finally been reached. I therefore voted in favour.

Tokia Saïfi (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) At the end of the 1980s, when the European Union decided to ban meat treated with growth hormones, the United States and Canada successfully argued their case at the WTO, which authorised them to impose trade sanctions against the EU. The economies of these two regions being so closely linked, these sanctions have had negative effects on both. That is why an amicable solution was sought and is now about to be implemented. I voted in favour of this report because its adoption will put an end to 20 years or more of trade wars with two of our most important trading partners, while keeping a high level of protection for European consumers without seeing too much of a serious impact on the agricultural sector. Indeed, the high-quality meat referred to in

this report is simply meat that has not been treated with growth hormones, and is of inferior quality compared to beef produced in Europe. The quotas authorising the import of this meat are limited, so the impact on the European sector will be extremely small.

Matteo Salvini (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) I totally support this measure, which definitively ends a trade war that has been ongoing for many years between the EU, on the one hand, and the US and Canada, on the other. The sanctions imposed by the US and Canada will finally be lifted, which will deliver considerable benefits to the European agricultural and food industry, especially Italy, which has important trade links with the transatlantic market.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The proposal we voted on this morning seeks to amend an existing regulation of the European Parliament opening an autonomous tariff quota for imports of high-quality beef from the United States and Canada, which puts an end to the long transatlantic dispute on the use of hormones in beef products. I support the proposed solution to the trade dispute and am voting in favour of the text. Specifically, the EU will progressively increase its tariff-rate quota for imports of hormone-free high-quality beef to a total of 21 500 tonnes in the first phase, and thereafter to 48 200 tonnes. This will inevitably result in a gradual reduction or suspension of the sanctions imposed on EU products by the United States and Canada. In order to make the implementation process more effective, the timetables for the first and second phases are the same for both the United States protocol and the Canada protocol: the second phase will begin on 1 August 2012 under the terms of both protocols. What we are asking the Commission to do is to ensure that the solution to the dispute will guarantee that imports of beef products will be in line with EU requirements.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – (NL) The European Parliament is today formally putting an end to one of the most serious trade conflicts ever between the EU and the United States and Canada. This trade dispute arose as a result of the total European ban on the use of hormones in livestock production. From now on, the United States and Canada will, on an annual basis, be allowed to export 48 200 tonnes of high-quality beef which has not been treated with hormones to the EU. In return, the agricultural trade sanctions which have been levied annually on agricultural products, totalling nearly EUR 100 million, will disappear for good. This agreement is of great political significance. The EU has maintained the hormone ban and its own food standards. Despite condemnation by the WTO, the EU market will not be supplied with hormone-treated beef from the US and Canada. All meat imports will be fattened on farms under the supervision of EU inspectors who will ensure that no hormones are administered. The agreement proves that you can consistently apply your own standards on imported agricultural products, even if they are formally in conflict with WTO rulings. In addition, increasing the amount of beef imported from the US and Canada from 21 500 tonnes to 48 200 tonnes per year will not have any negative impact on the European beef market, given that the import quota accounts for only 0.36% of the total EU beef and veal market.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Over recent years, the European Union has banned the import of beef and derived products, with the United States and Canada retaliating by introducing trade sanctions on agricultural products imported from Europe. In 2009, the bilateral negotiations established between the EU, the US and Canada enabled a solution to be reached to remove the barriers and sanctions that had been adopted. The talks eventually resulted in the conclusion of two Memoranda of Understanding. I am voting for this report, which will enable the European Union to respect the commitments it has made to resolve the dispute with the countries in question. The Memorandum of

Understanding will ensure that beef products imported under this quota will continue to meet the strict food-safety requirements provided for in EU legislation. It is also important to stress that the rapid adoption and entry into force of this regulation will contribute to improving transatlantic trade relations in this area of economic activity.

Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (FR) I voted against the decision to allow the United States and Canada to export more beef to the European Union in exchange for the lifting of duties on certain imports from EU Member States. The United States will be able to double their beef exports.

Adopting this report has put an end to the beef hormone dispute which has lasted for close to 20 years. However, one wonders if this is not at the cost of food safety and the health of European citizens. I am concerned that this undermines the European sanctions imposed in 1988 prohibiting the utilisation of growth hormones in meat livestock.

With this vote, the European Parliament is also giving in to the WTO, which, in 1999, condemned the EU for hindering free trade. The EU did not provide any evidence of the dangers of the hormones being used. The WTO forced the EU to renegotiate both these agreements with the United States and Canada.

This decision is bound to affect European meat production. Already making a loss and in decline for several years (a 31% drop over 15 years in France), the European agricultural sector will not see a resurgence in meat production, contrary to what the European Parliament is claiming to justify with this vote.

Iva Zanicchi (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The aim of this report is to put an end to two decades in which trade relations in agricultural products between Europe and the US had been affected by the late-1980s dispute on beef hormones. The agreement reached with the US, and subsequently with Canada, involves a zero-duty quota for US beef not treated with hormones in exchange for the lifting of trade restrictions. A quick and smooth adoption of the present regulation will therefore deliver mutual benefits, helping to re-build and strengthen trade relations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) We remain concerned as to the quality and safety of meat from the United States and Canada, bearing in mind what is known about the intensive and very intensive production methods used in those countries, but we are also concerned about the possible effects of the tariff quota on production in countries like Portugal. We know that allowing beef imports may have positive consequences for exports of various EU products, such as beef and pork products, but this will benefit chiefly the major exporting countries.

Report: Godelieve Quisthoudt-Rowohl (A7-0028/2012)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this report, since the purpose of Omnibus I and Omnibus II – documents related to the new systems of delegated acts and implementing acts that this report tackles – is to bring the European Union's common commercial policy into line with the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. This issue is important because it reinforces the powers of the European Parliament which should, therefore, be respected; meanwhile, from the political point of view, it is important to keep Parliament united around this aim.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this report. The Lisbon Treaty has led to many institutional changes. Under this Treaty, the European Parliament

becomes one of the legislators in trade policy and its consent is essential when concluding agreements. Given the legislative changes, this proposal is therefore intended to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the primary-law provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. This will enable the Commission's implementing powers to be applied more efficiently and effectively and will allow a more efficient and effective common trade policy to be pursued. The harmonisation of standard procedures will make trade policy clearer and will increase its transparency.

Sergio Berlato (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The report under scrutiny today is especially important since it sets out to amend some basic regulations on the common commercial policy so that their compatibility with the new provisions brought in by the Treaty of Lisbon can be guaranteed. The goal is to ensure that EU trade policy safeguard instruments are not weakened by the introduction of procedural changes which, even though they are necessary following the entry into force of the Treaty, risked having significant consequences on important aspects of the trade safeguard procedures. Bearing this in mind, one of the objectives of the regulation put forward by the Commission in March 2009 is to ensure that its own implementing powers are not monitored by either the Council or by Parliament, but rather by the EU Member States. I welcome this report and I hope that the text can be tightened up even more during the forthcoming negotiations with the Council. This would reiterate the importance of the EU's trade policy safeguard instruments, which offer a practical way for European enterprises to protect themselves against the anti-competitive practices of third-country competitors.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) Trade policy is one of the main pillars of EU relations with third countries. The achievement of a common commercial policy was part of the original plan for European economic integration, so that EU (initially EEC) trade policy has been broadly common with regard to the rest of the world since 1968, when the Customs Union was established. This Commission proposal for a regulation has the purpose of replacing the decision-making procedures for the various implementing measures laid down by 26 regulations with delegated acts or implementing acts. With regard to the regulations concerned, they contain mainly provisions allowing the use of trade policy safeguard measures. The Commission is proposing changes only where the Council decisions specifically provided for have previously applied. The Commission does not propose altering the references to the old comitology procedures pursuant to Council Decision 1999/468/EC. On this subject, the Commission has repeatedly stated that these adjustments are to be provided for in a second proposal for a regulation, namely, the proposal for a European Parliament and Council regulation amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy as regards the granting of delegated powers for the adoption of certain measures (Omnibus II).

Vito Bonsignore (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of amending the regulations relating to commercial policy, bearing in mind the values of rationalisation, legislative coordination and adaptation to the changes in international trade conditions, in the light of the experience gained in the years since the Treaty of Lisbon. More specifically, the proposed amendments respond to requirements of transparency and effectiveness from a practical and executive point of view, making it possible to adopt immediately applicable measures. The delegation to the Commission has been proposed in balanced terms that meet Parliament's prerogatives, with adequate guarantees with regard to the necessary provision of information about how the delegation is exercised, its renewal and the reserved power of revocation.

I believe that the inclusion of the provision for assistance to the Commission from the Member States in the issuance and implementation of urgent executive measures is also realistic and balanced. Inclusion of the new Council Regulation (EC) No 1236/2005 within the new discipline indicates a commendable appreciation for legislative action that does not lose sight of the cultural horizons of our time and the guiding light of European values when defining regulatory detail.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing.* – (CS) The Commission proposal, amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy, introduces changes only where the Council decisions specifically provided for have previously applied. The proposal does not suggest altering individual references to the old comitology procedures pursuant to Council Decision 1999/468/EC, which are contained in the regulations. On this subject, the Commission has repeatedly stated that these adjustments are to be provided for in another proposal for a regulation, the proposal for a European Parliament and Council regulation amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy as regards the granting of delegated powers for the adoption of certain measures (Omnibus II). In this context, it should be said that the European Parliament reached a ‘common understanding’ with the Commission and Council, making the use of delegated acts and of implementing provisions subject to a uniform model. To my surprise, the Commission proposal deviates considerably from these provisions, and this is unacceptable. The report rightly corrects the Commission proposal by applying the ‘common understanding’ criteria. This makes it possible to ensure consistency in the wording of all future European law relating to the use of delegated acts and implementing provisions.

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) The vote in favour of the report on the common commercial policy was necessary in order to establish a common denominator for Europe’s commercial policies. Once the Lisbon Treaty came into force on 1 December 2009, commercial policy became an area under the exclusive remit of the European Union. Thanks to the report, 26 regulations are being adapted to the provisions of the Treaty by granting delegated powers to the European Commission and by EU Member States establishing control procedures. These regulations include, for example, one laying down the trade arrangements applicable to certain goods resulting from the processing of agricultural products, and one concerning trade in certain articles which are likely to be used for capital punishment, torture or other punishments and forms of inhumane treatment.

Mário David (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This is a fairly technical report that reflects the application of the Treaty of Lisbon to the EU’s common commercial policy, seeking to amend certain regulations as regards the procedures for the adoption of certain measures. There was no great division between the parliamentary groups on the report hereby being adopted at first reading, as attested by its being voted for with only 1 vote against and 2 abstentions in the Committee on International Trade. It is now being submitted to the European Commission for analysis. The amendments proposed herein seek to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the common commercial policy of the European Union – which originated when it was just the European Economic Community – and I, as a convinced Europhile, am bound to support this report strongly.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this report because I believe the amendments adopted by the European Parliament contribute to a position balanced between the various legal instruments of the common commercial policy, taking into account the

provisions imposed by the Treaty of Lisbon and the interests of the three European institutions.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This proposal amends certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy as regards the procedures for the adoption of certain measures (Omnibus I) and is intended to adapt 26 trade policy regulations to the Treaty of Lisbon. The purpose of this Commission proposal for a regulation is to replace the decision-making procedures regarding implementing measures set out in 26 regulations using delegated acts or implementing acts. The regulations in question are mainly regulations enabling the adoption of measures to safeguard trade policy. These amendments are intended to make the exercise of implementing competences more effective and efficient, and to contribute to improving the common commercial policy.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This report, drafted by Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl, concerns the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy as regards the procedures for the adoption of certain measures. It concerns the adaptation of 26 regulations to the new primary-law provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, with regard to the legal concept of delegated acts. Until now, trade policy was outside the comitology procedure and was under the exclusive authority of Council decisions. I welcome the progress made in this area, specifically as regards the codecision procedure, since it is not acceptable for the Council and the Commission to be able to make decisions without the prior agreement of the European Parliament, which has the authority to monitor these acts. As regards implementing acts, I agree that the Member States cannot have a veto right that is generalised, but rather one that is exceptional. I regret that the United Kingdom and Ireland have not approved this regulation, for which I voted, which would have contributed to the truly free movement of persons and goods throughout the EU and to the more effective combating of dumping.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) The purpose of this report is to adapt to the terms of the Treaty of Lisbon 26 regulations relating to the common commercial policy (CCP). It is laid down in the Treaty that trade policy is an exclusive EU competence. Since it came into force, and since the adoption of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011, the Commission now has sole authority to implement the rules relating to trade policy. Choosing trade partners, what to trade and the objectives that should govern trade represents an important instrument of economic sovereignty. In the case of Portugal, for example, loss of this instrument of sovereignty led to very grave harm to countless sectors of the economy and to the country as a whole. Trade policy has become directed towards maximising the profits of big business in the EU's major powers, to the clear detriment of countries like Portugal and of the weaker economic sectors, which have found themselves exposed to ruthless, destructive competition. Free trade has been one of the pillars of the CCP, gearing it towards capitalist competition rather than cooperation and mutual benefit. Our profound disagreement with the CCP is therefore a given, which is bound to influence our analysis of this report.

Carlo Fidanza (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of the proposal because it aims to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the new primary-law provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. For example, the legislature will be able to delegate non-essential legislative acts to the executive, while retaining the power to revoke the delegation at any time. The affected measures are mostly designed to allow the use of trade safeguard regulations, apart from the regulation on protection against dumped imports from countries not members

of the European Community. The Commission is proposing changes only where the Council decisions specifically provided for have previously applied. As a result of these specific decision-making procedures, European trade policy has hitherto, essentially, been explicitly excluded from the comitology procedures. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and the adoption of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011, these special arrangements have now been terminated.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The submitted proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amends certain regulations relating to common commercial policy. As regards the procedures for the adoption of certain measures, it is intended to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the new primary-law provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. Specifically, it serves to align the regulations with Articles 290 and 291 TFEU and with Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers, which was prompted by Article 291(3) TFEU. Article 290 TFEU introduces, for the first time, the legal arrangement of delegated acts into European law. The legislature may therefore delegate non-essential legislative acts to the executive. The legislature retains the power to revoke the delegation at any time and thus take the relevant decision itself. In addition, any decision taken in the form of a delegated act may be vetoed by the legislature. It is sufficient for either the Council or Parliament to object to a Commission proposal for a decision. Article 291 TFEU, on the other hand, is concerned with the adoption of implementing provisions. The implementing acts are intended to ensure that European law is transposed uniformly in all Member States. The majority of the regulations concerned thus enable the adoption of measures for the protection of commercial policy.

Louis Grech (S&D), *in writing*. – Omnibus I and II will bring trade policy making into line with the Lisbon Treaty and, by giving increased powers to the European Parliament, will improve democratic legitimacy and accountability. As such, this report recognises the important role Parliament should have in EU trade policy. I welcome the fact that the Parliament will, in future, be informed about the EU's bilateral trade relations and that the Commission will also make annual reports about their activities in this area available to the public. This report's approach is to look at the pros and cons of each regulation by analysing delegated acts and implementing provisions while comparing procedures. This method is inclusive for all parties and takes a fair and democratic stance on such policies.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) The provisions of the Lisbon Treaty have given Parliament the role of colegislator in the area of commercial policy, and Parliament's consent is essential for any agreement to be made. In view of the changes which came into effect with the entry into force of the Treaty, it is essential to review and align all the important procedures in the common commercial policy, thanks to which it will be more efficient and effective. The transparency of commercial policy is a very important question, and this is reflected in the proposal, because it brings a number of regulations in the field of common commercial policy into line with the new provisions of primary legislation.

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced a new instrument in the form of delegated acts, thanks to which legislative acts of lesser importance may be delegated to executive bodies. An important role is played here by Parliament and the Council, because these institutions retain the right to revoke or object to every decision concerning the delegation of legislative acts.

The Treaty also speaks of implementing acts, which, together with delegated acts, replace the comitology procedure. Introduction of these important changes to decision-making processes and implementing measures urgently requires the adaptation of existing legal acts, and so I am pleased that Parliament has adopted a report today which allows these innovative measures to be introduced to these regulations on the common commercial policy.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this report because this proposal amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy is intended to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the new primary-law provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. The report is based on the changes brought about by the Lisbon Treaty and by the adoption of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011, and which systematically incorporates those changes into the secondary law of the common commercial policy. The report fleshes out the provisions of the Commission proposal in relation to the substance of all 26 regulations. It weighs up the pros and cons of using delegated acts and implementing provisions, and compares the advisory and examination procedures. The result is a balanced relationship among the various legal instruments, which takes into account the substantive and legal interests of all parties concerned, the legislation in force since 1 December 2009, and the institutional interests of the three European institutions.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) The report on common commercial policy is an important dossier which regulates and redefines the way that the European Parliament works with European foreign trade policy. The adoption of the report makes the use and implementation of delegating acts much simpler. I welcome the time savings that result from the removal of the consultation procedure and the specification of time limits because, in my view, a rapid and efficient process is in the interests of all stakeholders. I believe that always linking the final decisions on implementation to an examination procedure is the right approach which will guarantee more security for trading partners.

Philippe Juvin (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) The proposal for the Omnibus I Regulation is intended to bring 26 Council regulations on the EU common commercial policy into line with the post-Lisbon system of delegated acts and implementing acts. I voted in favour of this report during the vote in plenary.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of this report on amending the trade policy regulation. The proposal for a regulation – the so-called Omnibus – aims to adapt 26 legislative acts of the Council in the field of the EU's common commercial policy to the post-Lisbon system on delegated acts and implementing acts. In contrast to the text voted on in committee, the report adopted today puts forward several amendments designed to strengthen anti-dumping rules. Bearing in mind, furthermore, the need to come into line with the new comitology rules, the regulation on trade policies allows for greater transparency while, at the same time, affording greater protection for the trademarks of industrial products, which benefits both consumers and operators in the sector.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The Commission proposal for a regulation aims at replacing the decision-making procedures for the various implementing measures laid down by 26 regulations with delegated acts or implementing acts. As a result of these specific decision-making procedures, European trade policy has hitherto, essentially, been explicitly excluded from the existing comitology procedure. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, these special arrangements have been terminated, executive decisions on trade policy now being taken exclusively by the Commission. The objective of this

proposal is the integration of Commission responsibilities in all regulations in the field of the common commercial policy. I think this report is a balanced, well prepared document, meeting the economic and legal interests of all stakeholders, as well as the institutional interests of the three European institutions.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this proposal in which the rapporteur is tabling a report which is based on the changes brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon and by the adoption of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011, and which systematically incorporates those changes into the secondary law of the common commercial policy. The report fleshes out the provisions of the Commission proposal in relation to the substance of all 26 regulations. It weighs up the pros and cons of using delegated acts and implementing provisions and compares the advisory and examination procedures. The result is a balanced relationship among the various legal instruments which takes into account the substantive and legal interests of all parties concerned, the legislation which has been in force since 1 December 2009, and the institutional interests of the three European institutions.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) This proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy as regards the procedures for the adoption of certain measures (Omnibus I) is intended to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the new primary-law provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. More specifically, it serves to align the regulations with Articles 290 and 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and with Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers, which was prompted by Article 291(3) TFEU. The report fleshes out the provisions of the Commission proposal in relation to the substance of all 26 regulations. It weighs up the pros and cons of using delegated acts and implementing provisions, and compares the advisory and examination procedures. The result is a balanced relationship among the various legal instruments which takes into account the substantive and legal interests of all parties concerned, the legislation which has been in force since 1 December 2009, and the institutional interests of the three European institutions.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – Articles 290 and 291 of the Lisbon Treaty replace the old comitology procedure with a hybrid system of delegated acts and implementing acts. As existing pieces of legislation related to the EU's commercial policy need to be aligned to this new system of delegated acts and implementing acts, the Commission has come up with two proposals, Omnibus I and Omnibus II. Both reports are aimed at bringing trade policy making into line with the Lisbon Treaty, which has granted greater powers to the Parliament. Parliament's powers with regard to trade should be respected.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) The Treaty of Lisbon also gave rise to amendments with regard to the framework conditions for the adoption of delegated acts and implementing acts and for the formulation of trade policy. The regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers puts in place special procedures for the introduction of definitive anti-dumping and anti-subsidy duties. Although some amendments are certainly called for, I must, unfortunately, reject the report as a whole.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcome this resolution, which is intended to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the new primary-law provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. Consequently, the decision-making procedures currently applied for the various implementing measures should therefore be replaced with the procedures for delegated acts or implementing acts. I believe that it is advisable to empower the Commission to adopt delegated acts for an unlimited period. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the advisory procedure should be used in all cases where it is necessary for the Commission to consult the Member States before taking a decision. In exceptional and critical circumstances, the Commission must be enabled to take immediate measures as quickly as possible. In cases of urgency, the application of the advisory procedure would allow applicable implementing acts to be adopted immediately. The Member States should play an active part and express their position in all stages of decision making on trade policy safeguard measures. Furthermore, the Commission should publish reports in order to keep the European Parliament and citizens properly informed about all aspects of EU trade relations.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy. Specifically, it concerns adapting the regulation laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States over the Commission's implementing powers. The intention is to introduce the changes that the Treaty of Lisbon has introduced in this regard, taking into account the substantive and legal interests of all parties concerned and the institutional interests of the three European institutions.

Aldo Patriciello (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The proposal for a regulation under discussion is intended to bring 26 trade policy regulations into line with the new primary-law provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. More specifically, it serves to align these regulations with the provisions of Articles 290 and 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the rules and general principles concerning mechanisms for control by Member States of the Commission's exercise of implementing powers. In order to include European commercial policy in the comitology procedure, I am voting in favour of the proposal.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – Abstention. When work on the understanding between the institutions started in 2010, the Greens agreed to give the Council an extra 18-month transition period on trade policy measures, under the premise that the Commission would propose a reform of the basic anti-dumping regulation. For the Greens, this is a field in which we hope to establish criteria for ecological dumping. Nothing happened, however, in those 18 months and DG Trade says quite clearly that it does not intend to propose a substantive reform of the anti-dumping regulation. Consequently, in the vote on the Omnibus I proposal in committee, the Greens rejected all amendments proposing a shift to the advisory procedure in anti-dumping and anti-subsidy measures. We did not receive support and, in the end, abstained in the final vote. The reason why we abstained and did not vote against is that, of course – in general terms – we do not favour giving the Council powers which the Parliament does not have, thus creating inequality between the legislators.

Oreste Rossi (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) The report deals with a series of amendments to regulations relating to commercial policy mainly on the use of safeguard measures. The

special nature of these measures and the sometimes necessarily rapid amendments are precisely why the instrument of the delegated act has been used, as this allows the Commission to take action when necessary. The responsible committee also expressed its full support for the necessity of restoring the 15-month time limit for the introduction of duty tariffs and anti-dumping measures. I gave my full support and voted in favour.

Matteo Salvini (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) I would like to congratulate the rapporteur for her success in proposing numerous amendments within the Committee on International Trade to a proposal from the Commission that contained some highly unacceptable passages such as the extension of time limits for reaching the decision to introduce trade duties. These actions are necessary in order to safeguard our production system and therefore require speed, not more bureaucracy or time-wasting. I voted in favour of this very technical measure, also because it was necessary to bring these regulations in line with the new comitology procedure.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) We are being called upon today to approve at first reading the report by Ms Quisthoudt-Rowohl on the regulation referred to as ‘Omnibus I’, which aims to align certain commercial policy legislative acts, including the anti-dumping regulation, with the new ‘comitology’ procedures. I am pleased that the proposal has been approved by a large majority, so as to make sure that the wording will not be watered down, but perhaps strengthened further in the course of subsequent negotiations with the Council, and to confirm the importance of trade defence instruments, which represent the only possibility of protecting European businesses against anti-competitive practices followed by competitors outside Europe.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and the adoption of Regulation (EU) No 182/2011 means that, as in other areas of EU policy, executive decisions on trade policy are the sole responsibility of the Commission, using delegated acts and implementing acts. The purpose of this document, therefore, is to modify all the regulations in relation to this policy, so as to promote the adaptation of the regulation to the primary-law provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, specifically Articles 290 and 291 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. For these reasons, I voted for this European Union document.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the resolution on the proposal for a regulation amending certain regulations relating to the common commercial policy as regards the procedures for the adoption of certain measures. The purpose of the regulation is to replace the decision-making procedures for the implementing measures laid down by 26 regulations with delegated acts or implementing acts. With regard to the regulations concerned, they contain mainly provisions allowing the use of trade policy safeguard measures. The report recommends using delegated acts as part of the relevant regulations in the following cases: to amend or adapt one or more annexes to the regulation concerned and to adopt detailed provisions for the specific transposition of individual articles. In all these cases, the delegated acts are generally applicable acts of a non-legislative character, supplementing or amending certain non-essential provisions of the relevant legislative act pursuant to Article 290(1) TFEU.

Only the delegation instrument guarantees that the Commission’s actions are scrutinised by Parliament and the Council. The report calls on the Commission to present a biannual report on the application and implementation of the agreements to the European Parliament, including information about the activities of the various bodies responsible

for monitoring the implementation of the agreements and the fulfilment of the obligations arising from them, including obligations relating to trade barriers.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing*. – The draft regulation adapts these 26 regulations to Regulation No 182/2011. This regulation establishes two procedures for Member States to exercise such control over implementing acts: the advisory procedure and the examination procedure. In the first one, the Commission only takes the opinion of the Member States into account, whereas this opinion is binding in the second one.

Iva Zanicchi (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of this report which aims to align some commercial policy legislative acts, including the anti-dumping regulation, with the new comitology procedures. The text voted on today supports the claims of European industry, of which Italian manufacturing is an example of excellence even at a time of crisis, by vigorously defending the trade defence instruments, which are the only way to protect European businesses against the anti-competitive trade practices of third-country competitors.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) We believe that the definition of trade partners, of trade relations and of the objectives to which trade should be subject constitutes an important instrument of economic sovereignty. In the case of Portugal, not having this instrument of sovereignty has resulted in profound damage to innumerable sectors of economic activity and to the country in general. Trade policy has become geared towards maximising the profits of big business and of the EU's major powers, to the clear detriment of countries like Portugal and of weaker economic sectors, which have been exposed to ferocious and destructive competition. We argue that trade relations should be based on the principle of complementarity and mutual benefit. This report ties in with the trade policy that the EU has been implementing, with which we completely disagree.

Report: Giovanni La Via (A7-0040/2012)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am voting for this report. However, I would once again express my view that the European Union budget should be focused on growth and not austerity. The Commission proposal keeps the European economy under harsh austerity measures, but what we should be concerned about is economic development, growth promotion and job creation. The Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has managed to introduce some of these objectives. However, it is always important to stress that, if the Commission does not have an ambitious budget, it cannot intend to implement the Europe 2020 strategy.

Marta Andreasen (EFD), *in writing*. – My position on the budget of the European Union is very clear: I consider it to be an added tax on the Member States. In particular, the UK is taxed more heavily because it is a net contributor with an increasing contribution. I want to see the budget completely eliminated, with a 10% reduction each year, starting this year. For this reason, I could not support the ECR amendment number 25, which is inadequate as it only calls for a freeze.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) The general guidelines for the budget include several future priorities. What strikes me the most is that every effort must be made to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and young people because they represent the true potential for growth in the European economy. As Mr Lamassoure of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) has pointed out, efforts must 'promote long-term sustainable industrial policy' by supporting SMEs. Finally, we

must be more vigilant, stop Member States spending recklessly and enforce the 'golden rule', which I have actively defended, even though our Members on the left have thought it unnecessary.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this report. The EU budget is, above all, intended to create added value for the entire EU and its citizens. As the economic and social crisis continues, Member States are often imposing particularly severe economic and budgetary constraints, accompanied by reduced employment, a slowdown in economic growth, and a reduction in social and other guarantees, which essentially means that it will take even longer for the Member States and the whole of the EU to overcome the crisis. As a solidarity mechanism, the EU budget should not be reduced in 2013 because EU-funded programmes and instruments are intended to contribute to the long-term and sustainable growth of all EU Member States, stimulation of employment and further development of the Member States themselves. I therefore agree that the 2013 budget must be oriented towards the Member States' economic recovery policies, particularly by investing more in the creation of new jobs, by increasing youth employment, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises and other areas referred to in the Europe 2020 strategy.

Gerard Batten, Derek Roland Clark and Nigel Farage (EFD), *in writing*. – My position on the budget of the European Union is very clear: I consider it to be an added tax on the Member States. In particular, the UK is taxed more heavily because it is a net contributor with an increasing contribution. I want to see the budget completely eliminated, with a 10% reduction each year, starting this year. For this reason, I could not support the ECR amendment number 25, which is inadequate as it only calls for a freeze.

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) Even though, for now, this is only a declaration of intent, I support the guidelines for the new 2013 Union Budget mentioned by Mr La Via. I welcome, in particular, the call for prudence in framing new spending commitments, the rigour with regard to human resources and the appeal for a more sensible and targeted use of European funds to make them as useful and effective as possible.

Vito Bonsignore (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I would like to congratulate Mr La Via on his report, for which I voted in favour. The guidelines are the first step in the annual budgetary procedure. Therefore, the 2013 budget forecast must be well coordinated and responsible, and the measures to combat the economic crisis adopted thus far must now stimulate stable and lasting growth, including by means of targeted investments resulting in sustainable economic development.

The 2013 budget must therefore aim to fulfil the Union's programmes and priorities and catch up on late payments, especially as we are nearing the end of the current period of the multiannual financial framework. The European Union's budget is one of the most important instruments for demonstrating solidarity between Member States and between the generations and, given the financial crisis, it is also an important added value. Now more than ever, the collective efforts made at EU level must be strengthened in order to ensure that our actions deliver results.

Alain Cadec (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Mr La Via's report naturally has my full support, since it aims to ensure funding for the different programmes of the European Union. I think it is our responsibility, within the framework of preparing the Commission's draft budget for 2013, to acknowledge the general fiscal consolidation efforts undertaken. However, the current austerity must not undermine support for economic growth and

jobs. I note that the compromise reached between the different political groups has made it possible to include these two objectives.

Antonio Cancian (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of the proposal for a resolution of the European Parliament on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget because, firstly, I agree with the statement that the EU Budget is an instrument that demonstrates solidarity between Member States and between the generations and represents a clear common saving for the well-being of all.

Secondly, I believe that this is absolutely the right time to promote the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which have become the backbone of economic growth in Europe, having created 85% of the new jobs in the European Union between 2002 and 2012. We must therefore channel adequate resources into promoting an entrepreneurial mind-set and business start-ups, as well as simplifying the application procedure for EU-funded programmes.

Thirdly, I agree that we must urgently cut the delays in terms of payments and commitments, which are close to EUR 152 million for 2013, in order to respect the financial programming amounts and so as not to come into conflict with the zero debt policy of the EU. Finally, I welcome the agreement on financing the additional costs of the ITER project, which will not impair the successful implementation of EU policies during the final year of the current programming period.

Lara Comi (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of the resolution on the guidelines for the 2013 budget. 2013 represents a decisive moment in Europe's path to economic recovery and, following the necessary austerity measures, the time has finally come to encourage growth. Also as a result of the economic circumstances that we have to face, the European Parliament therefore has the responsibility clearly to identify the strategies that it considers to be more consistent and the priority points for overcoming the current economic crisis and its depressive effects on the real economy, especially the unemployment that it has caused. For this reason, I agree wholeheartedly with the principles expressed in this resolution. In particular, I should like to stress the importance of encouraging growth by promoting youth employment and the special measures for small and medium-sized enterprises, which are aims in line with the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 strategy. In congratulating the rapporteur, Mr La Via, I join him in emphasising the need to achieve adequate funding in order to honour the commitments made in previous years without affecting next year's budget.

Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (PPE), *in writing.* – (SV) We voted in favour of the report on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget as we are able to support the general priorities and objectives focusing on attaining a budget for economic recovery and growth. However, we cannot accept the report's position concerning the size of the budget as such. Contrary to what is stated in the report, budgetary discipline and priorities are what is needed. This applies to the whole of the EU, not just the Member States. Against this background, we voted in favour of the amendments that seek to provide clearer priorities in the budget, control of payments, evaluation of programmes, efficiency, monitoring and a freezing of the budget where, instead of larger budget lines, we focus on reprioritisation and transfers.

Andrea Cozzolino (S&D), *in writing.* – (IT) Since it marks only the first step in the long and tortuous route to the adoption of the 2013 EU Budget, the adoption of the 'general guidelines' has to be the occasion for strongly emphasising the role of Parliament in future

negotiations, especially with the Council, with the powerful aim of influencing the guidelines to be adopted by the Commission in its draft budget. It must be clear here and now that the budget approach cannot avoid the urgency of restarting sustainable growth and quality employment, in line with the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Commission and the Council cannot continue down the path of austerity that leaves no margin for the requirements of economic growth capable of generating new jobs. We have the duty to identify measures supportive of growth and employment and finally go beyond the mere requirement of balancing investment and austerity. For our part, moreover, there is a pressing need to draw attention to the worrying payment situation: we must not allow a repetition of what happened in 2011 and 2012, and the Council can no longer purport to decide *a priori* the level of payments based on political considerations, without taking into account the repercussions on past commitments.

Christine De Veyrac (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this text, which supports the efforts undertaken and financial instruments used by Member States and calls for a ‘responsible’ EU Budget for 2013. It also seems right to focus our efforts on the areas most affected by the crisis, that is to say, jobs for young people and small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as on investment in future projects with strong growth potential.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) This report sets out the general guidelines for the 2013 EU budget in relation to the Commission. This report has eminently political content relating to stepping up the promotion of growth and employment, laying particular stress on the role of young people and small and medium-sized enterprises. The intention is also to recognise the economic potential of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs and innovation. Parliament is hereby sending an important political message to the European institutions and the Member States about its firm commitment to meeting the growth and employment targets that have been set, and to adequate funding for the EU’s political parties. Finally, I call on the EU to demonstrate the same moderation and rigour demanded of the Member States in drawing up and observing their 2013 budgets.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The present economic and financial crisis requires great efforts at budgetary consolidation, not just by the majority of Member States, but also by the European Parliament and the other institutions of the European Union. This report on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget – Section III – Commission reflects this concern; specifically, the Commission’s desire for a 1% cut in the number of posts in its establishment plans as early as 2013, as well as a 5% cut in the staffing level in EU institutions and bodies by 2018. Although a reduction in administrative spending is being considered so as to free up funds intended for investment funds to boost economic growth and job creation, this reduction cannot jeopardise financial commitments regarding payment appropriations. I welcome the adoption of this report, which points towards a budget of rigour for 2013, but also a budget of growth and cohesion. I hope it will be possible to free up funds from heading 5 so as to increase the sums intended for youth employment and support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This report proposes general guidelines for preparation of the 2013 budget. Despite some mild criticism of the Council’s performance in budgetary matters, the document begins by praising ‘the fiscal consolidation efforts undertaken by most Member States because of the financial and budgetary crisis’ that are now being reinforced by the illegitimate International Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union, whose purpose is nothing more than to exacerbate and prolong indefinitely the so-called austerity measures that, as I have

mentioned, this report welcomes. It is also significant that it advocates greater political integration and the application of automatic sanctions to Member States. Whatever positive aspects the report may contain cannot remove or hide these profoundly negative ones. Needless to say, we voted against.

Carlo Fidanza (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the general guidelines for the 2013 budget, since they take note of the economic crisis afflicting Europe and propose serious and decisive measures for our future, such as the need for reinforcing the collective effort to carry out the actions already undertaken, specific actions and greater budgetary efforts to promote growth and employment. It is vital to support competitiveness with investments that would create jobs, above all, for young people, whose education, mobility and IT skills make them the main actors in achieving the future results we hope to obtain with the Europe 2020 strategy.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The European Parliament, noting the Commission's updated financial programming for 2007-2013 and the fiscal consolidation efforts undertaken by most Member States because of the financial and budgetary crisis, recalls that the European Union's budget is one of the most important instruments where solidarity between Member States and between generations is being demonstrated, and that it provides a clear added value, given its extraordinary impact on the real economy and on the daily lives of European citizens. If the EU's policies were to be financed solely by Member States, their costs would skyrocket. In this light, and if used in a synergetic manner, the European budget would genuinely represent a clear common saving for the well-being of all.

I also take the view, however, that austerity measures undertaken at national level should not lead to an equivalent decrease at EU level, since one euro spent at this level can generate savings in the 27 Member States. All the measures taken so far to combat the crisis should help to return to the path of growth. The tailor-made austerity measures already taken need to be accompanied by targeted investments resulting in sustainable economic development. I firmly believe that the EU budget has a decisive role to play in this context as a tool to ensure prompt and well-coordinated action in all fields.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) I believe that we need, first of all, to find an effective solution to the delicate issue of payments, bearing in mind, above all, that 2013 will be the last year of the current multiannual financial framework, during which a significant amount of payments currently in suspense will have to be made. In addition, I consider it fundamentally important to use the Union's budget to kick-start the economy and come out of the crisis by encouraging growth and especially youth employment and small and medium-sized enterprises, which, it is as well not to forget, are the backbone of the European economy. That is why I voted in favour.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), *in writing*. – (FR) At a time when all the Member States are undertaking austerity measures, of which their citizens are the main victims, being hit with higher taxes and seeing beneficial public spending cut, the budget guidelines in Mr La Via's report are heartbreaking.

For Europe, there is no question of a reduction in spending! There is no question of an end to spreading resources thinly or clientelism or the many useless and costly agencies. No examination of conscience over the usefulness, relevance or effectiveness of spending. No cost-effectiveness analysis. No decrease in budget lines, even those that have been under-utilised for several years.

Rigour seems not to feature in the programming of appropriations. When the whole world is treading water and tightening its belt, the European Union seems financially at ease over its own priorities and programmes due to the fact that it is unable to fall into deficit and has the right to draw to a limited but very real extent on national budgets. In other words, Europe has the right to put its hands into our pockets. In France, each year, this little game costs us a staggering EUR 7 billion. That is more than the social security pension fund deficit.

Catherine Grèze (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – (FR) With regard to the general guidelines for Section III of the 2013 budget, I had no choice but to vote against such a text. This text, which refers directly to the financing of ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor), and which is sorely lacking in ecological considerations, is unacceptable.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I abstained from voting on the European Parliament resolution on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget because, as the economic and social crisis continues, Member States are imposing severe budgetary constraints, which are causing unemployment, a reduction in employment, a slowdown in countries' economic growth and other negative social consequences. This is exacerbating the crisis in the EU Member States. We need to be more determined to achieve long-term and sustainable growth for all EU Member States, EU added value, employment and the creation of jobs. I believe that there must be a greater focus on Member States' economic recovery policies, and that we need to invest more in the creation of new jobs, boost youth employment in particular and offer greater support to small and medium-sized enterprises because they are the main engine of the economy, and pay special attention to other areas referred to in the Europe 2020 strategy. I believe that we are still not paying enough attention to the current crisis and are combating the consequences but not the causes, and the situation in some countries is only getting worse.

Jan Kozłowski (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) I endorsed the La Via report because I fully support the position of the rapporteur that the 2013 budget should be an instrument which, by supporting coordinated action, will allow the European Union to return to the path of economic growth and mitigate the effects of the crisis. I think the greatest threat to the EU is the alarming rate of unemployment among young people, which now exceeds 20% and, in some countries, is even over 40%. Furthermore, unemployment is now not just a problem for people who are not very well educated, because it is also affecting young people who hold the highest qualifications. This situation has an economic as well as a social aspect, and is a threat to the future social capital of Europe. Therefore, I think it is necessary to stress the funding of action aimed at achieving a rapid improvement of the situation of young people and creating conditions which foster the establishment and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I am very pleased with the result of today's vote on the guidelines for the EU's 2013 budget. As you all know, speaking of budgets in times of crisis is not a straightforward activity, especially if we consider the measures taken in every single Member State. Finding a balance between austerity and rigour, on the one hand, and targeted investments with ambitious aims, on the other, is not easy. However, the message that I wanted to send by the report that has just been adopted by a large majority in this Chamber is that we must use the demonstrable added value of the Union budget, as a budget for investment, to propel Europe out of the crisis and promote growth, development and employment, with particular reference to youth employment. These are the aims of our policy measures, these are the answers we wish to give to our citizens,

showing them that European resources, used in an efficient and coordinated way, are capable of having a tangible effect on their everyday lives.

Olle Ludvigsson, Jens Nilsson, Marita Ulvskog and Åsa Westlund (S&D), *in writing*. – (SV) We Swedish Social Democrats chose today to abstain in the final vote on the report on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget.

We believe that it is important for a reasonable investment rate to be maintained, so that Europe remains competitive in the future, too. Now more than ever we need to invest for jobs and growth – in research, development, climate change and training. The EU budget must also be given sufficient resources to be able to finance the commitments that have previously been decided upon. At the same time, however, we would like to emphasise that the EU ought, as far as possible, to have an attitude of restraint and provide these resources by means of redistribution within the existing EU budget. We therefore supported amendments that were moving in that direction, and we welcome the passages stating that the EU should also identify negative priorities. We would prefer to see the agricultural budget reduced in favour of the priorities set out in the Europe 2020 strategy, that is to say, research and development, conversion to green energy, regional growth, and so on.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted against this report because Amendment 25, which called for a freeze in the EU budget for 2013, was rejected.

Clemente Mastella (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) In order to respond properly to the current economic and social crisis and prevent future crises, the EU must adopt new integration measures and common instruments, such as automatic sanctions in the context of the deficit procedure. Its annual budget must be able to support Member States' recovery policies and the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. The promotion of growth and jobs requires specific actions and enhanced budgetary efforts to support competitiveness, innovation and small and medium-sized enterprises. The tailor-made austerity measures already taken need to be accompanied by targeted investments, resulting in sustainable economic development. The EU budget has a decisive role to play in this context as a tool to ensure prompt and well-coordinated action in all fields in order to mitigate the effects of the crisis on the real economy and to act as a catalyst to boost investment, growth and jobs in Europe. Therefore, we call for the adoption of a responsible and results-oriented budget for 2013, based on good-quality spending and optimal and timely use of existing EU financing.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this report outlining the guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget. The report focuses on strengthening efforts, made at EU level, in order to ensure that Member States' recovery policies are aligned with and get the most from the Europe 2020 strategy for Growth and Jobs.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I acknowledge the fiscal consolidation efforts undertaken by most Member States because of the financial and budgetary crisis. However, the EU will never be able to respond properly to the current economic and social crisis or prevent future crises without further political integration, without instruments like automatic sanctions, and without the Commission having the right to take legal action in a deficit procedure, but also common EU-funded programmes and the resources to make them work. Economic recovery requires measures to strengthen solidarity and boost sustainable growth and employment. The European Council's acknowledgement in its statement of 30 January 2012 is therefore important, but it must be stressed that there is a need for concrete measures to be taken, notably by making use of the EU budget as a

common instrument. I think that the priorities singled out in the abovementioned statement are precisely the ones defended by Parliament in previous budgetary procedures. That is why I voted in favour.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – The EU budget 2013 should boost growth, high-quality employment and start implementing the EU 2020 objectives. I think that the objective should be ‘jobs and growth’ rather than ‘austerity’. I fully support the rapporteur.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) A one-off measure in the form of the provision of EUR 82 billion to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is not enough. Firstly, there needs to be a re-think in connection with the Basel directives and we need to give SMEs permanent access to EU subsidies, and, secondly, we need finally to implement the cuts in red tape. If the economic heavyweight Spain is not willing to make additional savings in light of the increasing hole in the budget and yet this continues to have no consequences, while Hungary, on account of its alleged failure to meet budgetary objectives, is having its funding stopped, then it seems an example is to be made of Hungary because the right-wing Prime Minister, Mr Orbán, has contravened the prevailing dogmas of political correctness. We must finally put an end to the division into first and second class – in other words, politically undesirable right-wing democratic – Member States. I therefore voted against the report.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE), *in writing*. – (LT) I have, on several occasions, highlighted the fact that the preparation of the EU budget is, on the one hand, an excellent opportunity to genuinely solve the problems tormenting Europe – unemployment and the economic downturn. On the other hand, it is an opportunity to demonstrate that austerity measures need to begin at home. I therefore welcome the provision that next year’s EU budget must focus on combating the crisis, boosting the creation of new jobs (particularly for young people), scientific and technological progress and the efficient use of resources, but should, at the same time, also focus on increasing the efficiency of the administrative apparatus and reducing costs.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report, but I regret the wording in Article 9, where the question is wrongly put. This article states that Parliament ‘takes note’ of the Commission proposal to redirect appropriations worth EUR 82 billion ‘still to be programmed’. In actual fact, these are funds not yet allocated to concrete projects, but which have already been committed in accordance with the priorities and programmes of Member States.

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Studying this report has further increased my concerns about the unprecedented global crisis which has caused serious damage to economic growth and financial stability. The Basel directives need further discussion, particularly with regard to the bureaucratic obstacles faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In many countries in Europe, SMEs are still being held back, which makes economic recovery more difficult. We need to stimulate growth and job creation and take specific measures, including increased budgetary efforts, to promote competitiveness, innovation and SMEs, because the EU’s greatest economic potential lies with SMEs. Recent studies have shown that between 2002 and 2010, they created around 85% of all the new jobs in the EU. This demonstrates that they are the backbone of economic growth. Stepping up support for SMEs will also help to create jobs and increase vocational training opportunities, in particular, for young people. As the report does not put sufficient emphasis on SMEs, I have voted against it.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcome this resolution. I believe that with the existing monetary union, it is difficult to respond properly to the current or any future economic and social crisis. It should be noted that the budget is not flexible enough. It cannot be increased and made more effective without weakening democracy in all Member States. Effective economic recovery therefore requires measures to restore sovereignty. Europe urgently needs to solve the problems of unemployment and increasing poverty. I believe that it is very important for both the Commission and the Member States to make these problems a priority. Above all, it is crucial for adequate EU funding to continue to be provided to support growth efforts. Specific actions need to be established that would help reduce poverty, and boost growth and jobs, as well as means of supplementing measures and programmes at Member State level from the EU budget. Furthermore, when applying more stringent EU funding standards, we must, above all, support those companies that do not move their operations outside the EU. Specific action must be taken in the area of the budget that would help to support sustainable and long-term industrial policy, competitiveness and SMEs. European Investment Bank support for SMEs and infrastructure should be considered the top priority.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for these general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget. I would highlight the adoption of a responsible and results-oriented budget, based on good-quality spending and optimal and timely use of existing EU funds, as well as a well-coordinated and responsible budget for 2013.

Aldo Patriciello (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I accept that the EU budget must play a decisive role as a tool to ensure prompt and well-coordinated action in all fields in order to mitigate the effects of the crisis on the real economy and to act as a catalyst to boost investment, growth and jobs in Europe. As I agree with the importance of implementing priorities and policy commitments shared at the national and EU level in a way that is well-coordinated, coherent and timely. I voted in favour.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – Abstention. From a Green point of view, the main messages of the report (importance of EU budget for investments and recovery in Europe, need for adequate payment appropriations, refusal to apply austerity policies to the EU budget) are perfectly acceptable to us. However, when it comes to some details of policy orientation, we very much regret that greening of the budget, despite two minor references to it in the text, is clearly not among the priorities of the rapporteur. We believe, to the contrary, that greener policies, e.g. in the field of structural policies, agricultural policies and R&D would lead to faster job creation and more growth than is currently the case for the very traditional EU budget. The group therefore decided to abstain, leaving the possibility open to vote against the EU budget at a later stage.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The European Union budget is a strategic instrument demonstrating solidarity between the Member States and between the generations. Given its extraordinary impact on the real economy and the daily lives of European citizens, the 2013 budget must have an impact on growth and employment, encouraging investment, creating stability at a European level and helping the European Union to come out of the current economic and financial crisis.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) With the adoption of the budget guidelines, we have shown our spending priorities for 2013, seeking in this way to make our weight felt as legislators with the Council, and affirm the need for this Parliament. As was also stated in the wording of the guidelines, what we are asking the

governments and, hence, the Council, is to refrain from making artificial cuts in the Union's 2013 budget, which would otherwise jeopardise settlement of real needs and suspended payments. We wish to avoid a repetition of the situation we experienced last December, when the European Commission was unable to honour the contractual commitments that had been made. The topics on which the 2013 budget focuses will be youth employment and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Without denying the importance of these two subjects, I should nevertheless like to make it clear how the issue of agriculture remains key to the development of Europe's spending policy, where, for a long time now, operators in this sector have been asking for simplification and transparency of the paying agencies, as well as for clarity, above all, as regards the penalties applicable to those who fail to honour the commitments undertaken in the common agricultural policy (CAP). A budget that is at least equal to or greater than last year's is therefore essential for keeping alive a sector that is so essential for the whole of the EU.

Alf Svensson (PPE), *in writing*. – (SV) When, on 14 March, the European Parliament voted on guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget in respect of the Commission, I chose to vote in favour because I support the overarching aims of a restrained budget with the focus on sustainability and growth. However, the report contains elements that go against the general guidelines. Restraint is to be encouraged. In cases where more money is demanded, I voted in favour of amendments intended to prevent this and in favour of clear, measurable targets for payments for specific purposes. Additional resources must not be provided unnecessarily, and increased costs can be dealt with by means of reprioritisations within the budget through transfers.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) At a time when the Member States are making huge efforts to pursue fiscal consolidation and to resolve the economic and financial crisis in Europe, the 2013 EU budget is particularly important. I am voting for this report, as I consider it fundamental for the European Union budget to be geared towards fulfilling the Union's programmes and priorities, as set out in the multiannual financial framework, 2007-2013. There must also be regular budgetary adjustments in the final year of the programming period, in order to catch up in terms of payments made. I believe that the austerity measures that have been devised and already implemented must be accompanied by targeted investments which lead to higher value added at European level, to sustainable economic development, and to an improvement in the public's quality of life. Finally, I agree with the continued concerns put forward in the statement by the members of the European Council on 30 January 2012, emphasising the need to invest in growth and jobs, particularly in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises and young people.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the resolution on general guidelines for the preparation of the 2013 budget - Section III - Commission. I voted against Amendment 1 because I think that economic recovery requires measures to strengthen solidarity and boost sustainable growth and employment. We should insist on the need for concrete measures to be taken, especially by using the EU budget as a common instrument. I voted against Amendment 3 because I think that promoting the spirit of enterprise and business start-ups through concrete actions is particularly important, and the necessary resources should be provided for this purpose. I voted for Amendment 23 because I think that strengthening EIB support for SMEs and infrastructure should be considered a key priority. I voted for Amendment 15 because I think that there is a need to address urgently the challenges of rising unemployment and the growing level of poverty in the EU in the spirit of the 'European Platform against poverty and social exclusion'. I

voted for Amendment 13 because I think that automatic sanctions and the instigation of legal action by the Commission in the event of an excessive deficit procedure will not help us emerge from the crisis, failing the adoption of measures aimed at economic growth and job creation.

Thomas Ulmer (PPE), *in writing.* – (DE) I voted in favour of this report. Moreover, I see no problem in potentially restricting the Union's budget appropriations. It would be very nice to tell German taxpayers that. In any case, what Europe, and the euro area in particular, does with their money will always remain inexplicable to them. The principles of economy and accurate budget management are surely not wrong. Let us surprise ourselves.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing.* – The general guidelines for the 2013 budget stress the importance of measures to strengthen solidarity and to boost sustainable growth and employment. This is reflected by a focus on SMEs and by the action to redirect an additional EUR 82 billion out of Structural Funds to support SMEs and to combat youth unemployment in the European Union. Therefore, this report should be supported.

Iva Zanicchi (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The measures taken so far by the European Union to combat the crisis have aimed for a return to growth and to targeted investments resulting in sustainable economic development and the creation of new jobs. Therefore, the 2013 budget must be responsible and results-oriented, based on good-quality spending and optimal and timely use of existing EU financing, with investment in growth and jobs, especially in terms of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and opportunities for young people in the world of work. These are the reasons I voted in favour of the report.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) This document supports the so-called 'budgetary consolidation' efforts undertaken by most Member States because of the crisis. These are now being reinforced by the treaty, entitled 'stability, coordination and governance', which was decided on in contravention of the rules concerning the functioning of the EU. This seeks to compound and perpetuate these so-called austerity measures, which are currently forcing workers and peoples into poverty. It calls for greater political integration and the application of automatic sanctions on Member States, which goes completely against the spirit of solidarity. These aspects are unacceptable, so we voted against the report.

Proposal for a decision: B7-0151/2012

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this decision. Organised crime, corruption and money laundering merit more concentrated monitoring by governments and, given the times we are living in, also merit further attention. It is important to assess the impact that these activities have on the European Union and on each Member State. I hope that this special committee will be able to advise the EU effectively on the best way of preventing and combating these threats.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) A special parliamentary committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering has been set up by the European Parliament. It will have a year to investigate the infiltration of the EU's legal economy, the public sector and financial systems by organised crime, including by mafias, and to recommend means to combat it. The misappropriation of public funds, the infiltration of the public sector and the contamination of the legal economy and financial system are the main threats posed by criminal organisations in the European Union. During its term in office, the committee will evaluate the extent of the impact of organised crime on the EU economy

and society and will recommend legislative and other measures to enable the EU to respond to these threats at national, European and international levels. In short, Europe is sending a clear message to criminal organisations and gangs. In the next part-session, we shall vote on the composition of this committee, which will then be able to start its work by the end of April.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcomed the setting up of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. This interim committee will analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and its impact on the European Union and its Member States, and will make proposals in these areas to enable the EU to forestall and counter these threats more effectively.

Regina Bastos (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Organised crime constitutes a threat to society and the European economy. The European Union's struggle must adapt to the complexities of this phenomenon, targeting human trafficking, drugs and arms trafficking, as well as economic and financial crime, money laundering and corruption. The threats posed by criminal organisations in the EU range from the embezzlement of public funds to the contamination of the legal economy and the financial system, and so on. This motion for a resolution proposes the creation of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. This committee will have a one-year mandate to investigate the contamination of the legal economy, the civil service and the EU financial system by organised crime, and to propose ways of combating it. On these grounds, I voted for this proposal for a decision.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE), *in writing*. – (ES) I voted in favour of setting up this committee because it is necessary due to the impact that money laundering companies and organised crime have on the EU and the Member States, and because we must analyse the implementation of legislation in this area and its compatibility with fundamental rights.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament decision on setting up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, which will analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and its impact on the European Union and its Member States. The committee will have to propose appropriate measures to enable the European Union to forestall and counter these threats, at international, European and national level. This committee will also analyse and evaluate the current implementation of European Union legislation on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. Furthermore, it will examine and scrutinise the role and activities of European Union home affairs agencies (such as Europol, COSI and Eurojust) addressing matters relating to organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related security policies. The special committee will have to make visits and hold hearings with the European Union institutions and with international, European and national institutions, the national parliaments and governments of the Member States and of third countries, and representatives of the scientific community, business and civil society, as well as grassroots actors, victims' organisations, and officials involved in the daily fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering, such as law enforcement agencies, judges and magistrates.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) A true area of freedom, security and justice can only exist if citizens are able to enjoy freedom of movement with the best security conditions. This presupposes the existence of effective measures for preventing and combating crime, as well as coordination and cooperation between the competent police

and judicial authorities. The growing activity of criminal organisations has been spreading into numerous areas, from drug trafficking and human trafficking to, *inter alia*, financial crime, cybercrime, fraud, extortion and environmental crime. Organised crime constitutes one of the main threats to internal security and the public's freedoms. As such, I believe that combating this scourge should be a high political priority for the EU and its Member States. I therefore support the creation of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, which will, I hope, be able to carry out analysis and propose appropriate measures enabling the EU to prevent and combat these threats, thereby sending a clear message at EU and international level, in order to curb all forms of organised crime, which is not confined to Italy.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this report, as it advocates the creation of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. During its mandate, this special committee is intended to assess the impact of organised crime on the EU economy and society, and to table legislative recommendations for a response to these threats at international, European and national level.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) In light of the centrality of the issues of organised crime, corruption and money laundering, I believe that the creation of a special committee with the powers set out in the proposal by the Conference of Presidents is pertinent. I would express my hope to the committee and its members that good, fruitful work will be carried out.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The existence of a single market with freedom of movement for persons and goods, with unquestionable benefits for European citizens, at times also enables the existence of criminal organisations, corruption and/or money laundering. In view of this situation, on 25 October 2011, Parliament adopted a resolution on organised crime in the EU, in which it expressed its intention to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. On 16 February 2012, the Conference of Presidents adopted the decision to set up a special committee, having set out its powers and numerical composition. Since this concerns the creation of a body which facilitates the full functioning of the rule of law throughout the EU, from which European citizens only stand to gain, I voted for this special committee. Its aims are to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and their impact on the Union and its Member States, and to propose appropriate measures to enable the Union to forestall and counter these threats at national, international and European level.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The European Parliament has decided to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, with the following remit: to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and their impact on the EU and its Member States, and to propose appropriate measures to enable the EU to forestall and counter these threats, including at international, European and national level, and to analyse and evaluate the current implementation of EU legislation on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related policies, in order to ensure that EU law and policies are evidence-based.

The European Parliament has also decided that the powers of Parliament's standing committees with responsibility for matters concerning the adoption, monitoring and implementation of EU legislation relating to this area remain unchanged, and that the

special committee may make recommendations regarding the measures and initiatives to be taken, in close collaboration with the standing committees.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) This week, our Parliament approved the setting up of a special parliamentary committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering and I welcome it. I am convinced that this committee will provide an effective tool in analysing and evaluating these complex transnational phenomena, in preventing them and, most particularly, in combating them. This committee will be able to establish contacts, make visits, hold hearings, act with civil society and grassroots actors who are fighting on a daily basis against these scourges and, consequently, will be able to recommend measures to enable the European Union to combat these threats.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcomed this document because it establishes a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The objective of this special committee is to analyse and evaluate the current implementation of Union legislation on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related policies, in order to ensure that Union law and policies are evidence-based and supported by the best available threat assessments, as well as to monitor their compatibility with fundamental rights. I believe that we must take all action possible to prevent these threats and I therefore welcome the setting up of this special committee.

Philippe Juvin (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) This is an important resolution, which will help strengthen the fight against organised crime, corruption and money laundering. I endorsed this resolution during the vote in plenary.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) The proposal for a regulation to enhance the fight against organised crime is extremely important for the security and safety of European citizens and supports one of the main objectives of the European Union, namely, to create an area of freedom, security and justice without internal borders, in which crime is prevented and combated.

For this reason precisely, I believe that setting up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering will enable the European Union to forestall and counter these threats, including at national and international level. The responsibilities of this committee will include the analysis and evaluation of current implementation of Union legislation in this field in order to ensure that Union law and policies are evidence-based and supported by the best available threat assessments. This committee will also be responsible for examining and scrutinising the activities of the Union home affairs agencies working on matters relating to organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related security policies.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted in favour of setting up the special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. Its establishment also responds to the requests contained in the resolution on the EU's efforts to combat corruption, initiated by myself and adopted by the European Parliament on 15 September 2011. Organised crime and financial fraud cannot exist without corruption. Organised crime structures use corruption as a tool to gain access to undue resources and information and to make sure that criminal acts cannot be detected and proven. Money laundering acts provide the 'fuel' that organised crime structures use to perpetuate corruption. It is obvious that these three types of criminal acts can only be tackled simultaneously. European citizens want to see concrete measures to fight crime in Europe.

The committee will examine the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and its impact on the Union, the efficiency of EU home affairs agencies (such as Europol, COSI and Eurojust) in achieving their goals, and will propose measures to tackle these acts simultaneously. I hope the committee's activity will have concrete and visible effects for citizens, reducing the number of criminal acts and imposing effective penalties.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted to set up a new parliamentary committee specifically to investigate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering, to look at its impact on the European Union and its Member States, and to propose appropriate measures to fight these threats.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I support the creation of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, whose powers have been set out here. Given that the powers of Parliament's standing committees with responsibility for matters concerning the adoption, monitoring and implementation of Union legislation relating to this area remain unchanged, we should grant the special committee the ability to make recommendations regarding the measures and initiatives to be taken, working closely with the standing committees.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) By deciding to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, the MEPs have realised that the problem of the mafia, criminality and money laundering must be dealt with not only at the level of the State, but also at European and international levels.

A strong message has been sent to criminal organisations. We live in a Europe which strives for the respect of human rights and we must combat this type of unacceptable mediaeval practices which wreak havoc in Europe. It was time that we took effective measures to prevent mafia organisations from gaining access to circuits of the legal economy and/or infiltrating political circles. The new committee, which has the remit of evaluating the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering, as well as its consequences on the European Union and its Member States, will take such measures as to enable the European Union to prevent these crimes going unpunished or remaining beyond its control.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – The report is about the decision to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. I voted in favour and I am ready to engage actively in the work of committee.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Organised crime has been a widespread problem within the EU, particularly since the opening up of its eastern borders. People and drugs trafficking are also included in this, as are corruption, money counterfeiting and money laundering. As it is difficult for the individual Member States to overcome this problem, European cooperation in the area of combating crime makes perfect sense. The existing agency Frontex should also be strengthened in this regard in order to be able to stop criminals at the borders and prevent a further influx into the EU. I abstained from voting, as setting up a new internal parliamentary special committee will, in my view, have no real effect on combating crime.

Claudio Morganti (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) I decided to vote for this proposal to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering as there is no denying that these problems have a cross-border dimension affecting all EU countries, and

therefore it would be better to propose solutions to combat these common problems that are acceptable to all.

From this point of view, Italy can be considered a positive role model, especially thanks to the measures introduced in recent years by the former Minister for the Interior, Mr Maroni, that have delivered excellent results on a level never before achieved. Therefore, there needs to be a clear political intention behind any serious fight against organised crime, and illegal activities in general. Let us hope that Europe can demonstrate the same political will. We of *Lega Nord* are committed to bringing our ideas and initiatives, which have had proven positive results in Italy, to Brussels and Strasbourg as well.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I believe that it is appropriate to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. Organised crime is invariably linked to corruption and therefore poses a serious threat not just to a country's system of government, but the political security of the entire EU. It is an ongoing problem for society and the whole of the EU, the solution of which requires adequate measures. This special committee will help to establish radical measures for preventing crime and corruption, applied at international, national and European level, which will stop threats from spreading and enable the cause of these phenomena to be eradicated in an integrated manner. Furthermore, the functions assigned to the committee when it is set up will help to establish and enhance a prevention base of data analysis and scientific methodology.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE), *in writing*. – (EL) According to the European Commission's recent reply to a question raised by me, over 1% of GDP of the EU Member States (5% globally) is 'lost' as a result of corruption and fraud. In Greece, that equates to over EUR 3 billion. However, corruption is not confined to the economy. It runs through various sectors of society, such as sport – we need only remember recent events in Germany, Italy and Greece – and justice, to name but two. Therefore, combating and eliminating corruption is not just a moral duty; it is a financial necessity in these difficult times. The decision to set up a European Parliament select committee proves that the European Parliament is committed to examining, legislating and stepping up its efforts to combat organised crime, such as money laundering and corruption. The European Parliament's ambitious initiative, which I supported, must be accompanied by fast, tangible and, above all, quantifiable results.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this European Parliament decision on the creation of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, in view of the fact that its purpose is to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and its impact on the Union and its Member States, with the aim of proposing appropriate measures that enable the Union to forestall and counter these threats, including at international, European and national level.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I welcome the creation of this special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and I hope that it will carry out its mandate with zeal and determination so that, under its aegis, measures and initiatives can be identified enabling these threats to be combated effectively.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – In favour. I believe this is going to be a major tool to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and its impact on the Union and its Member States and to propose appropriate measures to enable the Union to forestall and counter these threats, including at international, European and national level; as well as to analysing and evaluating the current

implementation of Union legislation on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related policies, in order to ensure that Union law and policies are evidence-based and supported by the best available threat assessments, as well as monitoring their compatibility with fundamental rights in accordance with Articles 2 and 6 of the Treaty on the European Union, in particular, the rights set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the principles underpinning the Union's external action, in particular, those set out in Article 21 of the Treaty.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) With this vote, we are deciding on the constitution of a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, which will have various tasks. First of all, the committee, which will have 45 members, must examine and evaluate the current implementation of EU legislation on corruption and monitor its compatibility with fundamental rights. In order to establish the necessary contacts, it will have to make visits and hold hearings with the European Union institutions and with the international, European and national institutions, the national parliaments and governments of the Member States and of third countries, representatives of the scientific community, and business and civil society. The term of office of the special committee shall be 12 months, counting from its establishment, with the possibility of extension.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for the decision by the Conference of Presidents to set up a special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering for a 12-month period with the possibility of extension, with the power to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and its impact on the Union and its Member States, and to propose appropriate measures that enable the Union to forestall and counter these threats, including at international, European and national level. Among other tasks, this committee should analyse and evaluate the current implementation of Union legislation on these issues and examine and scrutinise the implementation of the role and activities of EU agencies in the context of these issues.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted in favour of the mandate for the special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The special committee will have the following remit: to analyse and evaluate the extent of organised crime, corruption and money laundering and their impact on the European Union and its Member States; to propose appropriate measures to enable the EU to anticipate and counter these threats at international, European and national level; to analyse and evaluate the implementation of EU legislation on organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related policies; to examine and scrutinise the implementation of the role and activities of the EU home affairs agencies (such as Europol, COSI and Eurojust) working on matters relating to organised crime, corruption and money laundering, and related security policies. The committee will have 45 members and a 12-month mandate commencing 1 April 2012, with the opportunity to extend it. The committee will present to Parliament a mid-term report and a report at the end of its mandate, containing recommendations concerning the measures or initiatives to be taken.

Viktor Uspaskich (ALDE), *in writing.* – (LT) This report is very important for Lithuania. The Lithuanian economy and society continue to be dogged by corruption. According to the latest data from the Corruption Perceptions Index, of all the European Union Member States, Lithuania is at the bottom of the table, in 19th place. Lithuania scored 4.8 points out of 10 (10 points are given to countries with great transparency). According to data in the report, nine out of ten Lithuanians believe that corruption is the greatest problem facing

their country. During a recent visit to Lithuania, the Director of Transparency International stated that lawyers and business people welcome Lithuania's anti-corruption laws and other legislation, but that the laws themselves are not working. It is right. We urgently need an appropriate guarantee that laws will be enforced. The rapporteur also mentions the problem of organised crime, which sadly is continuing to poison Lithuania. At the beginning of the year, Europol listed Lithuania as one of five organised crime hotspots in Europe, one particularly active in moving narcotics and contraband cigarettes into and out of Russia. The situation will get even worse unless action is taken in the near future. According to data in the international media, it is expected that Lithuania's shadow economy will account for more than 20% of its GDP by 2015.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), *in writing*. – I wholly object to the content of the website in question. However, I object in principle to efforts to close down discussion on certain areas of public policy, in particular, on immigration and 'multiculturalism'. These are matters of enormous public concern, which successive governments in many countries, as well as the EU, have failed properly to address and which can now barely be discussed. Equally, the Netherlands Government must remain free to determine its own European policy and should not be criticised by the European Parliament for expressing doubts about Schengen. Finally, it is not within the remit of the European Parliament to instruct a sitting European Prime Minister on the course of action that he should take on a domestic political question. I therefore abstained in the vote on the resolution.

Derek Vaughan (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the creation of a special parliamentary committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The committee has a year to evaluate the extent of organised crime's impact on the EU economy and society and recommend legislative and other measures to enable the EU to respond to these threats at international, European and national levels. Misappropriation of public funds, infiltration of the public sector and contamination of the legal economy and financial system are some of the key threats posed by criminal organisations in the EU. The special committee is to start work by the end of April 2012, and will have the power to hold hearings with EU and national institutions from all over the world. I believe that the formation of this committee reflects the institutions' persistence that they will not back down to organised crime.

Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this resolution for setting up this new special parliamentary committee, the so-called 'anti-mafia' committee. With the adoption of this decision, MEPs have shown their political will to comprehend and combat the complex phenomenon of organised crime and its opaque financial activities using the globalised neoliberal market, with dramatic consequences not only for the economy, but also for European society as a whole. I especially hope that the commitment to involve both the civil society organisations working on the matter and the victims of these crimes will be respected in the work of this committee.

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Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am voting for this resolution, as I believe that the creation of a European Law Academy, the adoption of a Council decision setting up a European judicial training network, reflection on the role of national judges in the European judicial system, and the development of an EU criminal justice area can only benefit the European public. Everything which contributes to improving Europeans' trust in the area of justice is welcome.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of a report aimed at harmonising and coordinating existing judicial training in Europe and promoting dialogue and professional contacts. Today, it is essential to have cooperation in judicial matters and this starts at the training stage. If it is to be effective, judicial cooperation must cross borders. We must therefore now promote multilingual training. I approved a report which, amongst other things, allows judges, legal practitioners, professional bodies, academics and law students to go abroad with Erasmus or, more generally speaking, to participate in training courses abroad. With a view to encouraging cooperation, the Commission will hold an annual forum at which judges of all levels of seniority in areas of law where domestic and cross-border issues frequently arise can hold discussions on a recent area or areas of legal controversy or difficulty.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution. In its previous resolutions, the European Parliament has expressed the opinion that the European judicial area must be built on a shared judicial culture among practitioners, the judiciary and prosecutors. Discussion fora should be encouraged, which would discuss the identification of principles of common professional ethics, the rule of law and principles for the appointment and selection of judges, and would avoid the politicisation of the judiciary and promote mutual trust. I believe that the pilot project launched in 2012 will provide an effective basis to further establish and develop cooperation and the exchange of information between legal professionals. I welcome the resolution's call for an annual forum to be held at which judges of all levels of seniority would give their opinions on the legal system's existing problems, which would help encourage more detailed discussions and contribute to the development of specific proposals and to improving legal education in Europe.

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for this resolution because I think that it is vital for judicial staff to have ongoing professional training to ensure the operation of Member State institutions. The aim of the pilot project launched by the European Parliament is to strengthen the network of training providers and institutions in this area. The intention, in keeping with the Stockholm Programme, is to create a fully independent and impartial judicial system. The separation of powers of state – especially the political from the judiciary – is one of its aims.

Public confidence must also be strengthened in judges and the public prosecutor's department, as well as free access to justice. I would like to mention at this point the training programmes developed by the National Union of Notaries Public in Romania in cooperation with the European Council of the Liberal Professions, of which it is a founding member. This is the only possible way of guaranteeing the fair administration of justice and its role as a moderator in society. The national judicial system is the guarantor of basic rights closest to their beneficiaries. Cooperation on organised crime is happening for the first time in this area and needs to be supported as part of the proposed project.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution because the European Commission's target of guaranteeing training for half of the EU's legal professionals is far from being reached. According to the study, language barriers, a lack of timely information on existing programmes, the fact that programmes are not always adapted to judges' needs, together with judges' heavy workloads and the lack of relevant funding are among the reasons for the relatively low level of respondents receiving training in EU law (53%, and only one third of them within the last three years). The European judicial area must be built on a shared judicial culture among practitioners,

the judiciary and prosecutors which is not only based on EU law but developed through mutual knowledge and understanding of the national judicial systems, a root-and-branch revamping of university curricula, organisation of exchanges, study visits and common training with the active support of the Academy of European Law, the European Judicial Training Network and the European Law Institute. A further aim would be to coordinate the training provided by existing judicial training schools and facilitate and promote dialogue and professional contacts. The European Parliament proposes that the Commission hold an annual forum at which judges of all levels of seniority in areas of law can hold discussions on recent areas of legal controversy or difficulty.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing.* – (CS) In my opinion, one of the objectives that the EU should set is to coordinate the judicial training provided by existing judicial training schools and to facilitate and promote dialogue and professional contacts. In this context, I believe that multilingual training is important, as the study shows that only a relatively small number of judges speak a foreign language well enough to be able to participate actively in judicial training in other Member States. One way of resolving the problems (costs, language training, cost-effectiveness) is to utilise modern technology and finance the creation of on-line applications prepared by the national schools, the Academy of European Law, universities and other trainers, which would consist of training courses with video material, including language training (with particular emphasis on legal terminology) and instructions about national legal systems, particular legal procedures and so on. The applications would be provided free of charge to members of the judiciary. Successful participation in such courses could constitute a gateway to Erasmus for judges, and to participation in training courses abroad.

Cristian Silviu Buşoi (ALDE), *in writing.* – (RO) Ongoing professional legal training is of paramount importance to ensuring that not only national but also the European legal system functions efficiently. The benefits which European cooperation in this area could bring are far from insignificant. The exchange of experience among law practitioners has an extremely important role as it is open to interpretation, and the views held by practitioners may differ, even though the subject is the same. Another consideration in addition to this aspect is that legal doctrine is dynamic, and practitioners' knowledge of the law must be constantly updated.

Establishing a 'European legal culture' by organising internships at European level, using new 'apps' (applications intended for legal training) and by moderating annual forums where judges and prosecutors can exchange their experiences would facilitate the spread of information at European level. This step helps remove existing barriers in the internal market in this area, which will make it easier for lawyers/judges to access legal posts in the EU, while also helping them obtain training at national level. We deserve to have the best lawyers and judges. To achieve this, we need to offer them the opportunity to have training at European level.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Professional and training networks are increasingly important in all sectors. Notwithstanding the national circumstances, the justice sectors in the Member States should not be left out of this trend. On the contrary, they should employ the many technological tools currently available, in order to be able to make contact more easily and mutually enrich one another. Closer contact between judges and other justice-sector professionals from different countries is a fair and important objective, which could have a positive effect on the way justice is administered. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise the pivotal role played by national legislation, which should not be replaced

by a single European legal system. The Member States' legal traditions and the way in which their systems have evolved to fit their specific peoples constitute an important asset which should not give way to a temptation to standardise and centralise.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) This motion for a resolution follows the oral questions submitted by Mr Lehne and Mr López Aguilar on behalf of the Committee on Legal Affairs and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, pursuant to Rule 115(5) of the Rules of Procedure. The European Union's continued and systematic adoption of legislation which is, at times, at odds with national legislation, forces the judiciary and legal professionals to undergo thorough and continuous training. Articles 81 and 82 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provide for the adoption of measures aimed at ensuring support for the training of justice sector professionals. It is therefore essential to create the conditions for judicial training for all those who must combine European law with national judicial systems, which is an absolute prerequisite for the proper functioning of a European judicial area. I therefore welcome the adopted resolution, for which I voted, and I hope that its aims of providing training for approximately 700 000 justice professionals by 2020 will be achieved.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This report includes certain specific issues regarding changes in judicial training. It should be read in the context of recent legal developments as part of the integration process, and particularly those taking place or otherwise included in the Stockholm Programme. As we have already said, this programme as a whole constitutes 'a violent attack on an issue as central to state sovereignty as justice'. The inanity, and even ludicrousness, of some of the report's proposals, such as the development of applications – 'apps' – as interactive and accessible as Apple's iTunes, should not make us forget what underlies it. The intention is to coordinate the training of judges with a view to legal harmonisation for the purpose of creating a 'European area of justice' based on the principles of the Stockholm Programme. For these reasons, we did not vote for this report.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The European Parliament has pointed out that the European judicial area must be built on a shared judicial culture among practising lawyers, the judiciary and prosecutors. This culture was based not only on EU law, but also developed through mutual knowledge and understanding of the national judicial systems, a root-and-branch revamping of university curricula, exchanges, study visits and common training with the active support of the Academy of European Law, the European Judicial Training Network and the European Law Institute.

Judicial training should be linked to a debate on the traditional role of the judiciary and its modernisation. I believe that a common judicial culture also needs to be created among members of the judiciary in order to promote the core values of the judicial profession by discussing and promulgating common professional ethics, the principles of the rule of law and the principles for the appointment and selection of judges, thereby promoting the mutual trust necessary to make the common judicial area a reality.

A further aim would be an effort to coordinate the training provided by existing judicial training schools and to promote dialogue and professional contacts. I also think that multilingual training is no less important, as a study has shown that only a relatively small number of judges speak a foreign language well enough to be able to participate actively in judicial training in other Member States.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) Language difficulties, lack of understanding of neighbouring judicial systems, infrequent contacts and exchanges between institutions: these are all obstacles to the construction of a European judicial area. The challenges of judicial training at the level of the European Union are therefore considerable as there can be no construction of a European judicial area if we do not provide appropriate training for those who are the actors within it. Therefore, we must really take this issue in hand and make considerable efforts in relation to judicial training, not only of judges, but also of all other legal practitioners: lawyers, notaries, ombudsmen ... in other words, all legal practitioners. There is a clear need today to build a European judicial culture and to do everything in our power to achieve this. We must promote contacts, exchanges and, in particular, I would like to point out the importance of setting up a genuine ‘Erasmus for judges’.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing.* – (FR) The progress that Europe is making in building a common European judicial culture is still too slow.

If we want to go further in constructing mutual confidence within the European judicial area, we must, in particular, set up networks between judges of different cultures and improve coordination of existing networks in order to create ‘circles of coherence’. New technologies do indeed enable us to get round budgetary constraints on the organisation of direct contacts which involves considerable movement on the part of judges, but electronic communication is not enough. The creation of a forum at which judges can meet each other is essential, as is the involvement of judges from the Luxembourg and Strasbourg Courts.

Finally, it is necessary to improve the coordination of the training provided by the existing judicial training schools and to facilitate and promote dialogue and contacts between practitioners in this sector. Without this, we will find ourselves again in a few years’ time lamenting that we have made too little progress.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution because the European judicial area must be built on a shared judicial culture among practitioners, the judiciary and prosecutors which is not only based on EU law, but developed through mutual knowledge and understanding of the national judicial systems, a root-and-branch revamping of university curricula, organisation of exchanges, study visits and common training with the active support of the Academy of European Law, the European Judicial Training Network and the European Law Institute. A common judicial culture also needs to be created among members of the judiciary using the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the work of the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission to promote the core values of the judicial profession by discussing and promulgating common professional ethics, the rule of law and the principles for the appointment and selection of judges, while avoiding the politicisation of the judiciary and, at the same time, promoting the mutual trust necessary to make the common judicial area a reality. Finally, it is proposed that the Commission should hold an annual forum at which judges of all levels of seniority in areas of law where domestic and cross-border issues frequently arise can hold discussions on a recent area or areas of legal controversy or difficulty, in order to encourage discussion, build contacts, create channels of communication and build mutual confidence and understanding.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted for this resolution, which, among other things, proposes that the Commission hold an annual forum at which judges of all levels of seniority in areas of law where domestic and cross-border issues frequently arise can hold discussions

on a recent area or areas of legal controversy or difficulty, in order to encourage discussion, build contacts, create channels of communication and build mutual confidence and understanding. The resolution also states that such a forum could also afford an opportunity for the competent authorities, training providers and experts, including the universities and the professional bodies, to discuss judicial training policy and the future of legal education in Europe

Mario Mauro (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The European judicial area must be built on a shared judicial culture among practitioners, the judiciary and prosecutors, which is not only based on EU law, but developed through mutual knowledge and understanding of the national judicial systems. For this reason, I agree with the proposals contained in this resolution, especially as regards the future of the pilot project presented by Ms Mazzoni and Mr Berlinguer. I voted in favour.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I welcome the adoption of this European Parliament resolution on judicial training. Identifying needs and suggesting improvements in legal training practices in the EU, creating a common judicial culture among members of the judiciary, promoting the core values of the profession, discussing common professional ethics, avoiding the politicisation of the judiciary and thereby promoting mutual trust are the factors key to realising the common judicial area. I applaud the pilot projects presented in the context of this resolution and am certain that, in future, standards of legal education in Europe will be increasingly demanding.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – The report states that the European Parliament believes that direct contacts are the best option, that in view of the budgetary constraints, as well as the responses given by judges in the study, such training and advice could also be provided via the Internet (video-conferencing, on-line courses, webstreaming) as well as by means of exchanges; it notes that judges call for further assessment and adaptation of training programmes to their needs, while they seem to prefer interactive training where they can exchange experiences and discuss case studies rather than ‘classic’ (top-down) training formulae. What is more, I think that special attention should be paid to Latvian judges; they should be trained to make objective decisions without emotions or despite exposure to other factors.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) In order to keep up to date with the increasingly rapid developments in the judicial sphere, further training may be essential. However, it would be desirable if long-standing problems in connection with the rights of minorities and restitution issues, not to mention unlawful legislation like the Beneš decrees, were finally resolved in a satisfactory manner for those victims who have been discriminated against. The EU would do well to finally deal with these problems instead of washing its hands of them by claiming a lack of competence. After all, there is always a little loophole if a particular matter is important to the Commission. For this reason, I have abstained from voting.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcome this resolution. It should be noted that it is very complicated to organise courses for judges, given their heavy workloads and the need to ensure the independence of the judiciary. It is therefore crucial for training to be properly coordinated and allocated adequate financial support. Training is aimed at developing a European judicial culture. Furthermore, it is very important for training to meet the special demands of judges and to examine current legal problems. I believe that it would be very practical and effective to use the latest technologies for judicial training,

which would facilitate savings and would make it easier to absorb information. Training should also be provided in different languages, thus enabling judges to participate in training in other Member States. Exchange programmes should thereby be encouraged.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this European Parliament resolution on judicial training as, among other proposals, it adopts the initiative to hold an annual forum at which judges of all seniority levels in areas of law where domestic and cross-border issues frequently arise can hold discussions, network, create channels of communication, and build mutual trust and understanding. This forum could also afford an opportunity for the competent authorities, training providers and experts, including universities and professional bodies, to discuss judicial training policy and the future of legal education in Europe.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This report aims to create a common judicial area through broader and better training in the area of EU law. In spite of all the difficulties, particularly linguistic and financial, this project has immense potential which can be realised by making use of new technologies and by promoting the study of comparative law and international law, as well as through better language training for the judiciary. I voted for this report, as it may well prove to be a very important step towards creating a European legal culture

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – In favour. We believe – while acknowledging that direct contacts are the best option – that in view of budgetary constraints, as well as the responses given by judges in the study, such training and advice could also be provided via the Internet (video-conferencing, on-line courses, webstreaming) as well as by means of exchanges. We also note that judges call for training programmes to be further assessed and adapted to their needs, while they seem to prefer interactive training, where they can exchange experiences and discuss case studies, to ‘classic’ (top-down) training formulae.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Currently, according to the latest statistics, the judicial training on offer is far from meeting the Commission’s target, namely, that it should be available to half of EU legal professionals. For this reason, the training supplied by the existing judicial training schools must be coordinated, while a further aim must be to facilitate and promote dialogue and professional contacts. With this vote, it may also be possible to allow judges to take part in Erasmus exchanges and training courses abroad. Moreover, the foundations are being laid for organising an annual forum, in which judges at all levels of seniority may be able to hold discussions on topics that have recently given rise to legal controversies or difficulties. In this way, discussion is encouraged, contacts are established and channels of communication are opened. This forum could also provide the competent authorities, training providers and other experts, including the universities and the professional bodies, with the opportunity to discuss judicial training policy and the future of legal education in Europe.

József Szájer (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) I would like to remind the honourable Members that the question of judicial training cooperation arose at EU level as a Hungarian initiative, and was a priority in the programme of the Hungarian Presidency. In this field, the problem is that although European Union legislation is gaining pace, a significant proportion of the national judges in the Member States know very little about EU sources of law and do not speak foreign languages to the extent of being familiar with the legal terminology of the other Member States. The first step should involve making training accessible to European

Union legal experts and creating a system that ensures multilingual training. In the absence of the establishment of new institutions, a starting point could be to establish cooperation between existing national training institutions and to place greater emphasis on comparative and international legal studies. The European justice area needs to build on a common judicial culture, which, in my view, is founded on both European Union law and common knowledge of the national justice systems.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The European judicial area should be built on a shared judicial culture among legal professionals, the judiciary and prosecutors, and not just on EU law. Moreover, this culture should also be developed through mutual knowledge and understanding of the national judicial systems, a root-and-branch revamping of university curricula, exchanges, study visits and common training. I believe that it is necessary to create networks between judges of different cultures and to improve coordination of the existing networks. It is also essential to coordinate the training provided by existing judicial training schools and to facilitate and promote dialogue and professional contacts. I therefore voted for this report.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the resolution on judicial training, because I think that the European judicial area must be built on a shared European judicial culture among practitioners, judges and prosecutors, which is not only based on EU law but developed through mutual knowledge and understanding of national judicial systems, a root-and-branch revamping of university curricula, as well as through exchanges, study visits and common training. In this respect, the active support of the Academy of European Law, the European Judicial Training Network and the European Law Institute is vital. The comparative study on judicial training in Member States, commissioned by Parliament and carried out by the Academy of European Law in collaboration with the European Judicial Training Network, has highlighted the existence of linguistic barriers and the lack of information (available in good time) regarding existing programmes, and the fact that programmes are not always adapted to judges' needs. I think that the use of ICT, video-conferencing, online courses and web streaming, as well as organising exchanges of experience, facilitating and promoting dialogue and professional contacts, can help improve the legal training process.

Viktor Uspaskich (ALDE), *in writing*. – (LT) As the rapporteur observes, reducing the politicisation of the legal system is essential for the strength and well-being of Lithuanian democracy. Unfortunately, this area is much neglected in Lithuania. Public confidence in the Lithuanian legal system remains very low. According to the latest data from the Freedom House organisation, in 2011, public distrust of courts grew dramatically in Lithuania, reaching 44%. The report stresses the need for judicial reform. The small changes that have slowly been achieved are not enough. Suspects arrested are not always given legal assistance in a timely manner, and lengthy periods of detention on remand remain a problem. Freedom House notes that there are still reports of illegal police actions against detainees, including minors, and the response of judges and prosecutors to such actions is inadequate. The deficiencies of the Lithuanian legal system are a crucial part of a greater problem. According to the latest studies carried out by Bertelsmann, only 50% of Lithuanians believe that they live in a state where all political rights are granted. I agree with the rapporteur and believe that we should try to strengthen the core values of the judicial profession and create a judicial culture. This is crucial for creating mutual trust between the state and its citizens.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This report on judicial training is part of the Stockholm Programme, intended to create a 'European area of justice', which

we consider a violent attack on one of the central issues of state sovereignty: justice. The intention of legal harmonisation is very clear in the text. The expansion of common actions in relation to cooperation between police forces and judicial authorities, and cooperation between secret services, together with the introduction of an internal security strategy and of new means for exchanging data within the EU, are taking place at the expense of the rights, freedoms and legal guarantees enjoyed by all residents of EU countries. Matters referring to law and justice should be unconditionally linked to the history, the reality and the wishes of each Member State, so we cannot accept any attempt to standardise them.

Motion for a resolution: B7-0126/2012

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this resolution, since it is necessary to continue combating the exploitation of child labour worldwide. As such, I welcome all multi-stakeholder initiatives – involving governments, industry, producers and civil society – aimed at eradicating child labour, improving the lives of children and adults on cocoa farms, and ensuring that cocoa is grown responsibly. Indeed, this aim is in line with the recent regional initiative by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Secretariat of the Sahel and West Africa Club, and the International Cocoa Initiative to promote best practice in combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms. It is important that these initiatives be followed up appropriately, in order to ensure genuine progress.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) At a time when the European Union is both the biggest producer of chocolate worldwide and the main importer of cocoa, I think that the European authorities cannot shirk their responsibility with regard to working conditions in this sector. European institutions have a duty to intervene and send a clear message, emphasising that human trafficking and child exploitation in this sector are not tolerated or encouraged by the authorities and European consumers. I voted in favour of this resolution.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I strongly defended the resolution aiming to combat child labour in the cocoa sector. Indeed, this sector requires a sizeable workforce, and a large part of this is made up of children. I have come back from Burkina Faso where many children are sold to work in the cocoa plantations, and this is outrageous and unacceptable. While the resolution recognises that producers face strong pressures to keep labour costs down, it calls on cocoa growers and processors, governments, traders, producers, and us as consumers of chocolate, to live up to their responsibilities in combating forced child labour and trafficking in this sector. In order to effectively combat cocoa-based products derived from child labour, we have sought to encourage those countries that are signatories to the agreement reached at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to act to guarantee traceability along the entire supply chain.

Zoltán Bagó (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) I supported the motion for a resolution on child labour in the cocoa sector, since the protection of children is of prime importance not only in Europe, but throughout the world. It is precisely for that reason that the European Union needs to use all possible means at its disposal, whether that be concluding an international agreement, working out economic alternatives for the countries concerned or, if all else fails, exercising economic pressure. In my opinion, governments need to use legal means to put pressure on the public to ensure that a child's main commitment is school, since education is one of the foundation stones of development. Where governments fail to do so of their own accord, it is the duty of the international community to exert pressure on

governments. For that reason, I regard the withdrawal of trade preferences during the review of the European Union's Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) and the use of legally binding clauses in trade agreements, including measures to be applied in the event of infringements, as referred to in the motion for a resolution, as appropriate.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution. Forced child labour and child exploitation remains one of the greatest problems, particularly in less developed countries. Poverty, outdated farming techniques and child labour are widespread in cocoa cultivation. The European Parliament has, on many occasions, voiced concern over the exploitation of children in this sector. I agree that the EU must step up its efforts to combat this phenomenon, particularly by including provisions banning the exploitation of children in all trade agreements. We also need to guarantee that the EU consistently takes this position in all areas, particularly trade and development, in order to ensure the proper enforcement of human rights, and social and environmental standards, and that, if necessary, it imposes appropriate sanctions for failure to meet these standards.

Regina Bastos (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) According to International Labour Organisation estimates, more than 215 million children worldwide are victims of child labour, engaged in activities that should be abolished. Children who are victims of child labour, on top of not having access to education, are often victims of ill-treatment, physical and psychological violence, and abuse by supervisors, work colleagues and others. Although programmes and initiatives to combat the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms have made significant progress in recent years, much remains to be done. This motion for a resolution, for which I voted, strongly condemns the use of child labour on cocoa fields.

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of this resolution, which openly condemns an abuse which, in the cocoa sector as in all others, we must resist and fight: the exploitation of child labour. Although cultures and economic realities different from ours may tolerate or even see child labour as a source of support, there is no child alive that does not have the right to childhood, and I shall continue to fight for this.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution because we must strongly condemn the use of child labour in cocoa fields. The use of the worst forms of child labour in the growing and harvesting of cocoa beans is unacceptable. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated that more than 215 million children worldwide are child labourers engaged in activities that should be abolished. The European Parliament calls on all stakeholders involved in growing and processing cocoa beans and their derivative products – namely, governments, global industry, cocoa producers, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and consumers – to live up to their respective responsibilities in terms of combating all forms of forced child labour and trafficking, to share expertise and to collaborate towards a sustainable cocoa supply chain free from child labour. The European Commission should ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights, social and environmental standards and their enforcement, accompanied by measures to be applied in the event of infringements.

Philippe Boulland (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) The world cocoa economy should not be subject to unbridled speculation. We must ensure that fair prices are established both for producers and consumers. However, first and foremost, we cannot turn a blind eye to European values, particularly human rights and children's rights. Children must not, under

any circumstances, be exploited as forced labour on cocoa plantations. The European Union has a duty to promote responsible development and a smart economy by combating all forms of child exploitation.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing*. – (CS) I consider it important to strongly condemn the use of child labour on cocoa fields. All stakeholders involved in growing and processing cocoa beans and their derivative products – namely, governments, global industry, cocoa producers, organised labour, non-governmental organisations and consumers – must live up to their respective responsibilities in terms of combating all forms of forced child labour and trafficking, share expertise and collaborate towards a sustainable cocoa supply chain free from child labour. Real changes can be delivered only through global cooperation addressing the root causes of child labour. The Commission must ensure policy coherence in all its initiatives, namely, those related to trade, development (in particular, as regards children's access to education), human rights, public procurement and corporate social responsibility, and to encourage the exchange of best practices between the different economic sectors in which child labour occurs. The Commission must ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights, social and environmental standards and the enforcement of those standards, accompanied by measures to be applied in the event of infringements.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) It is intolerable that, in the 21st century, there are still more than 200 million children who are victims of child labour, more than 100 million of whom are subject to the worst forms of child labour; some of these are under five years old and the vast majority are under 15 years old. Employing children means easy money and it leads to sick, malnourished children living in precarious conditions, disadvantaged in their intellectual development and their right to education; in short, denied their right to be children. There is no doubt that the exploitation and trafficking of children in cocoa plantations are worrying and must be duly taken into account in Parliament's decision on the adoption of the International Cocoa Agreement. The EU has a huge responsibility to ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction, and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights, and provision for effective and dissuasive sanctions. It is also important to involve all stakeholders, governments, industry, producers and civil society in the adoption of measures and actions necessary for eradicating child labour, and ensuring that cocoa is grown responsibly and in a dignified manner.

Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) Since, in recent years, programmes and initiatives to combat the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms have made significant progress, and renewed conflict situations in the region, in particular in Côte d'Ivoire, have again exacerbated the situation facing children, I think that the use of forced child labour on cocoa farms is an extremely serious matter and that it should no longer be tolerated.

Christine De Veyrac (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this resolution, which enables us to combat a type of exploitation that, unfortunately, is still a reality. Globalisation must not make us forget to respect fundamental rights such as the prohibition of human trafficking and children's rights.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this resolution, as it advocates the creation of suitable legislation which enables a response to the underlying causes of child

labour, and which analyses these and other related issues. Child labour is not an isolated issue: it stems from tradition, poverty, a lack of alternative forms of income, a lack of opportunities for young people and, essentially, inadequate legal protection for children's rights.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The EU recognises that the general characteristics of the cocoa sector are poverty and obsolete agricultural practices, but also, and most importantly, child labour. Since the EU is the largest importer and consumer of cocoa in the world, as well as the headquarters of the largest chocolate processors and manufacturers, it must take responsibility for making the sector more sustainable. Many reports reveal that cocoa farmers continue to use child labour. In spite of a great deal of child labour taking place within a family context, the situation is worrying, and it is vital to address this problem.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) According to International Labour Organisation data, more than 215 million children worldwide are child labourers, 115 million of them engaging in dangerous activities. The majority of these situations occur in so-called developing countries. As such, in order to put an end to this scourge, it is essential to eradicate the situations of poverty that drive it. This motion for a resolution, pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure, tabled by our fellow Member, Mr Moreira, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, deals with child labour in the cocoa sector. West Africa accounts for 70% of global cocoa production and about 7.5 million people work in cocoa production in that region, almost exclusively on family smallholdings. This facilitates recourse to child labour in a society in which there are neither alternatives for wealth creation nor opportunities for young people once they have finished school. I voted for this resolution, since I believe that children's right to education and a place in school must be prioritised. This is the only way to end poverty in societies which consider child labour an additional source of income.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) The main purpose of this resolution is to warn of the use of child labour in the cocoa fields and to condemn it, along with all other such exploitation of children. The resolution comprises a whole list of good intentions and best practices in the struggle against child labour. Whilst proposing aims such as 'to ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights', it 'calls on the Commission to ensure policy coherence in all its initiatives'.

What this ignores, however, is that many of the clauses demanded are already written into certain agreements, but are dead letters, never being implemented in practice; however, they are always, always being subordinated to business and profit. There is no focus here on the real reasons for the use of child labour, specifically, the socio-economic conditions of farmers and workers on these cocoa plantations.

The resolution makes some pertinent observations on the pressure to reduce labour costs in the cocoa fields. Lamentably, however, no solutions are proposed to counter these pressures and bring about the necessary wage increases for these workers.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing.* – (SK) The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that more than 215 million children worldwide are engaged in activities that should be abolished. Of these children, 152 million are under the age of 15, and 115 million engage in dangerous activities.

Parliament has to give its consent to the conclusion of the International Cocoa Agreement 2010. Stakeholders have, however, raised strong concerns about the use of child labour in the growing and harvesting of cocoa beans. Any use of the worst forms of child labour in the growing and harvesting of cocoa beans is unacceptable. In recent years, programmes and initiatives to combat the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms have made significant progress, although much work remains to be done on account of the vast scale of this sector.

I profoundly believe that the use of child labour on cocoa plantations should be strongly condemned. I feel that it is important that all stakeholders involved in growing and processing cocoa beans and their derivative products – governments, global industry, cocoa producers, organised labour, non-governmental organisations and consumers – should live up to their responsibilities in the fight against all forms of forced child labour and trafficking, share expertise with each other, and collaborate towards the creation of a sustainable cocoa supply chain free from child labour.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) The European Union is the world's principal consumer of chocolate, 70% of global cocoa production is cultivated in West Africa and approximately 18 million children throughout the world are estimated to work on cocoa plantations. The European Union cannot turn a blind eye to this utterly unacceptable situation which is dreadful in human terms. These children work in extremely dangerous conditions, they are frequently exposed to pesticides, and many are victims of human trafficking. I therefore strongly voted in favour of the annex to this resolution, which follows Parliament's consent to the renewal of the International Cocoa Agreement in terms of production and commerce. This resolution is aimed at focusing on the issue of child labour in cocoa plantations and, in particular, it strongly condemns the use of child labour (and unacceptable types of work) in the growing and harvesting of cocoa beans.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing.* – (FR) According to some studies, it is estimated that more than 250 000 children work in the West African cocoa plantations. They handle pesticides without protection and, on a daily basis, use tools which are very dangerous for their age.

As the main importer of cocoa beans, the European Union shoulders a heavy responsibility for combating child labour, most particularly in the cocoa sector, and must establish a sustainable supply chain for cocoa in which children play no part. The place of children is not in the cocoa plantations but rather at school, and actions must be supported to promote this change.

In short, and in more general terms, all trade agreements should include provisions to reduce poverty and promote decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on respect for human rights, social and environmental standards, as well as penalties for infringement.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution because it calls on all stakeholders involved in growing and processing cocoa beans and their derivative products – namely, governments, global industry, cocoa producers, trade unions, non-governmental organisations and consumers – to live up to their respective responsibilities in terms of combating all forms of forced child labour and trafficking, to share expertise, and to collaborate towards a sustainable cocoa supply chain free from child labour. Only a holistic and coordinated framework that addresses the root causes of child labour and which is implemented on a long-term basis by governments, industry,

traders, producers and civil society can deliver significant changes. I welcome the provision that the Commission must ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights, social and environmental standards and the enforcement of those standards, accompanied by measures to be applied in the event of infringements.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing.* – (DE) The European Union is the world's largest consumer of chocolate and home to many leading chocolate manufacturers. Therefore, the EU must ensure that the necessary raw materials can be produced sustainably and without the exploitative use of child labour. The new version of the International Cocoa Agreement is an important step in the collaboration between the cocoa producing and cocoa consuming countries. We are responsible for ensuring that producers can continue to develop their businesses in future under fair conditions. We must focus our attention on exploitative child labour which harms children's health and we must use all the resources at our disposal to combat it. I believe that this resolution highlights the concerns of the European Parliament in a targeted and balanced way.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – 70% of the world's cocoa is produced in West Africa, where many farms employ children that are trafficked and forced to work in conditions akin to slavery. Progress in eradicating child labour is now in the hands of the chocolate industry, which must use its power and its profits to end this shameful practice. We all enjoy giving our children Easter Eggs, but if one thinks of the conditions of the West African children in the cocoa regions, it takes away the fun of Easter. Ten years ago, the big chocolate companies promised to get rid of child trafficking in the cocoa industry in West Africa, but there is still only a tiny amount of 'Traffick Free' chocolate. According to the charity, Stop the Traffik, in these ten years, the cocoa industry has earned GBP 600 billion. Only 0.0075% of this has been invested in improving working conditions in West Africa. I always recommend Fair Trade chocolate wherever possible.

Mario Mauro (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) First of all, I agree on the call for countries that have still not done so to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Labour Organisation's conventions Nos 138 and 182 and to implement them swiftly. This must be the first step towards fostering awareness across the globe of the scourge of child labour. Governments should pay particular attention to the risks to the health of children made to work in cocoa plantations. I voted in favour.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) In the wake of the International Cocoa Agreement, Parliament, while taking account of the importance of this sector, does not overlook one of the major problems associated with it: the exploitation of children. Since the European Union is the largest consumer of chocolate in the world, this resolution is of major importance and aims to implement measures enabling greater sustainability in the sector and raising awareness among stakeholders of the issue of child labour, which, unfortunately, continues to exist in this and other sectors.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) While it is important to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy, to strengthen the economies of the Member countries, and to ensure fair prices for both producers and consumers, we cannot overlook European values, particularly human rights and, therefore, children's rights. Children must not, under any circumstances, be exploited as forced labour on cocoa plantations. The

European Union must promote responsible development and an intelligent economy by supporting education for children.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – Children working in cocoa fields are exposed to different health risks and this is unacceptable. It is important that different actors involved in the fight against child labour develop a holistic strategy that touches upon the root causes of the problem. The Commission should look into the possibility of developing an effective system to trace goods that are produced by means of child labour. I voted in favour.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this report which, over and above the decision taken on the International Cocoa Agreement, condemns the problem of child labour in the cocoa sector. The cocoa sector currently employs thousands of children and this is unacceptable. During the debates, one of the main questions raised by MEPs during the examination of this agreement was the use of child labour in the cocoa fields. Even though much of this child labour is carried out within the family framework, this is a disturbing situation. I therefore think that the problem of the worst forms of child labour needs to be resolved urgently. The resolution does indeed recognise that producers face strong pressures to keep labour costs down, but calls on cocoa producers, EU political leaders, and consumers to live up to their responsibilities in combating child labour. From now on, it is the European Commission's duty to ensure the coordination of its various policies, and to ensure that all bilateral agreements do indeed include a 'human rights' clause.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution because child labour poses an unacceptable risk to children's health and development. Furthermore, only through joint efforts can we combat child labour in cocoa plantations, particularly in Western Africa, where child labour on farms is most widespread. A holistic and coordinated plan must therefore be applied, removing the root causes of child labour. Given the scale of the problems, sufficient resources must be allocated to achieve this objective. I believe that any work carried out by children should be considered child labour and the aim is to eliminate it. The Commission should provide more active support for measures that would increase assistance for fair trade networks in the cocoa sector and village cooperatives and would enable them to obtain a fair price for their production. Companies would thus be encouraged to give greater assistance to initiatives combating child exploitation on cocoa plantations.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE), *in writing*. – (EL) It is estimated that approximately 215 million children work in activities that involve abuse of their rights, are bad for their health and undermine their dignity. International resolutions and conventions create a clear framework governing the minimum age on the labour market and working conditions. The cocoa sector is, unfortunately, one of the many sectors that employ millions of children, demanding labour intensive work for minimal pay and abusing almost all their rights. Clearly, the western world bears its share of the responsibility for the extensive use of forced child labour on cocoa plantations. This resolution, which I supported, calls on the Member States and, more importantly, the European Commission, which enters into bilateral agreements with cocoa producing countries, especially in Africa, to ensure, among other things, that all trade agreements include effective provisions and legally binding clauses on internationally recognised human rights and social and environmental standards and their application and make provision for measures to be taken if they are infringed.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this resolution on child labour, as it strongly condemns the use of child labour in cocoa fields. Child labour is one of the most tragic forms of abuse of children's rights, affecting not only the future of the children, but also the future of the community to which they belong.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) At a time when Parliament is being called on to adopt the International Cocoa Agreement 2010, it is only right to assess the initiatives to combat the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms. With this in mind, it is important to recognise that, despite the progress that has been made, much remains to be done. There is a need to insist on the need for authorities to assume their responsibilities as regards combating child trafficking and all forms of forced child labour, and to promote full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Labour Organisation's conventions on this matter. In the same way, it is important to welcome multi-stakeholder initiatives – involving governments, industry, producers and civil society – aimed at eradicating child labour, at improving the lives of children and adults on cocoa farms, and at ensuring that cocoa is grown responsibly.

Crescenzo Rivellini (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Today, at the plenary session in Strasbourg, we voted on a resolution on child labour in the cocoa sector and Parliament gave its consent to a new international agreement on cocoa production and trade that will also provide effective tools for tackling the problem. Many children working in the cocoa fields in fact are engaged in dangerous activities, such as exposure to pesticides and child trafficking.

The agreement should also introduce accredited third party-audited traceability and require signatories to collect and analyse data through appropriate studies in order to provide clear statistics about the exploitation of minors in the cocoa production sector. As the world's leading consumer of cocoa and host to many chocolate manufacturers, the EU cannot ignore such injustice and has to take steps to ensure that production is lawful.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – In favour. This text urges states which have yet to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or ILO conventions Nos 138 and 182 to ratify and implement these conventions swiftly; expresses the view, moreover, that states should implement all appropriate policies to foster awareness of child abuse in the labour market and of the need to comply with existing national and international rules; and strongly condemns the use of child labour on cocoa plantations.

Tokia Saïfi (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) This resolution accompanies the approval of the International Cocoa Agreement by the European Parliament. While I am in favour of the agreement, I must reiterate the concerns expressed by my colleagues from the International Trade Committee during our debates. Indeed, this sector is still seriously affected by the problem of child labour and the European Union has a double responsibility in this respect: on the one hand, it is the main importer and main consumer of cocoa; on the other, it has a duty to promote its fundamental values in all areas. That is why I voted for this resolution, which represents the position of the European Parliament in this area and which will enable us to ascertain how our demands are implemented. The resolution will also serve as a basic text for the European Commission in its dealings with the other members of the International Cocoa Organisation.

Matteo Salvini (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of this resolution because it is always necessary to underline the fact that trade with our international partners must always take place in a context of respect for human rights. In this case, the Committee on International Trade has prepared a text that precisely underlines the details of the serious

issue of child labour in cocoa production. It will be difficult to eradicate such phenomena, but it is the duty of the European institutions to try and do so, including with resolutions such as this.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Estimates suggest that there are 215 million child labourers worldwide compelled to engage in activities that should be abolished, 152 million of whom are even under the age of 15, whereas 115 million are engaged in dangerous activities. While 70% of the world cocoa production is cultivated in West Africa and about 7.5 million people work in cocoa production in that region, children and young people must be protected from exploitation. With this vote, all stakeholders involved in growing and processing cocoa beans and their derivative products – namely, governments, global industry, cocoa producers, organised labour, non-governmental organisations and consumers – are urged to live up to their respective responsibilities in terms of combating all forms of forced child labour and trafficking, to share expertise, and to collaborate towards a sustainable cocoa supply chain free from child labour.

Thomas Ulmer (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) Training instead of exploitation must be the top priority for the future of the 215 million children who regularly have to work instead of attending school. It is certainly problematic, but only by raising awareness, issuing warnings and exercising our trading power and consumer power can we give these children any prospects for the future. All of us ought to consider this when we eat or drink cocoa products.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted to adopt the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 as I am fully aware of the agreement's importance for countries which produce cocoa. Nonetheless, I would like to mention my concern about reports on the use of child labour involving inhumane conditions in the production and harvest of cocoa beans. As such, this issue needs to be seriously discussed in the International Cocoa Organisation and responses found in order to combat it. All stakeholders should be involved in the process, from national governments to industry, civil society, exporter countries and non-governmental organisations, so as to raise awareness of the issue. Finally, in the case of a systematic practice by a company or a country, we should not dismiss the possibility of imposing sanctions.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the report on child labour in the cocoa sector. The International Labour Organisation estimates that more than 215 million children worldwide are engaged in child labour. West Africa accounts for 70% of global cocoa production, with approximately 7.5 million people working in cocoa production in this region. Cocoa farming is very labour intensive during harvest seasons and producers face strong pressures to keep labour costs down. At peak times, all family members, including children, are involved in this process. Studies carried out in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire highlight that children working on cocoa farms are exposed to different types of danger. I urge the Commission to ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights and social standards, and that these standards are enforced, accompanied by measures to be applied in the event of infringements.

Derek Vaughan (S&D), *in writing*. – Tackling forced child labour is a large ongoing task. I supported this report to help enable the eradication of child labour in the cocoa industry. The production of chocolate is very labour intensive and can include exposure to pesticides.

Furthermore, studies suggest children have been trafficked to work in this sector, which causes great concern. This report will encourage everyone in the chain of production – from growers to governments – to play their part in combating forced child labour, and is a starting point for further action.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing*. – This motion for a resolution takes into account the fact that the ILO estimates that more than 215 million children worldwide are child labourers; that 70% of world cocoa production is cultivated in West Africa and all family members, including children, are involved in this work; that children working in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are exposed to different types of danger; and that there are many programmes and initiatives to combat such child exploitation. Having regard to all this information, the Parliament urges those states which have yet to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child or ILO conventions Nos 138 or 182 to ratify them urgently; urges all stakeholders to live up to their responsibilities in terms of combating all forms of forced child labour and trafficking; urges the Commission to ensure that all trade agreements include effective provisions on poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and safe working conditions, along with legally binding clauses on internationally agreed human rights; welcomes all initiatives to promote best practice and calls on the International Cocoa Agreement partners to look into the possibility of introducing accredited, third party-audited traceability for the cocoa supply chain.

Anna Záborská (PPE), *in writing*. – (SK) According to the International Labour Organisation, it is necessary to distinguish between two forms of child labour. Nothing should preclude children or adolescents from engaging in work that does not harm their health and personal development and does not overlap with their schoolwork. The problem is not who works, but under what conditions.

Forced child labour on cocoa plantations in Africa is as bad as the modern slavery of adults in factories producing mobile phones and computers. By purchasing chocolate without a certificate of origin, we support inhumane treatment just as much as if we buy electronics with components that are made in China. We hurt people who have no choice, but we also harm ourselves, because in the unfair battle to reduce production costs, Europe cannot – and I hope, does not want to – win.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This resolution makes some important observations on the pressure to reduce labour costs in the cocoa fields, but does not propose any solutions to counter these pressures and bring about the necessary wage increases for these workers. The main reasons for the use of child labour lie in the difficult socio-economic conditions of the farmers and workers on these cocoa plantations. However, we consider it vital to warn people about the use of child labour in the cocoa fields and condemn it, along with all other such exploitation of children.

Recommendation: Vital Moreira (A7-0024/2012)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am voting for this report, as I believe that the International Cocoa Agreement can be an opportunity to address the issue of child labour. It is important for the various actors in the fight against child labour to develop a strategy enabling them to identify the root causes of this problem. The European Union can and should play a vital role, as when it adopts policies, it will also be able to use them to deal with the problem. One of the immediate solutions is for the Commission to try to carry out a survey of goods produced using child labour.

Laima Liucija Andrikiene (PPE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this resolution on the text of the new 2010 International Cocoa Agreement, which will replace the International Cocoa Agreement 2001, as extended. I support the objectives of this agreement. It will lead to the strengthening of the global cocoa sector, supporting its sustainable development and increasing the benefits to all stakeholders, will provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and, with the private sector, will strive towards obtaining fair prices, will promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms, will promote transparency in the world cocoa economy, and, in particular, in the cocoa trade, through the collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant statistics and the undertaking of appropriate studies, and will also promote the elimination of trade barriers.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I welcome the conclusion of the new International Cocoa Agreement, which will replace the former legislative framework dating to 2001. The new agreement meets the requirements of business transparency, creating prerequisites for sustainable development and a fairer distribution of financial resources resulting from transactions.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) The cocoa sector accounts for a large workforce and is a major source of income for millions of people if we consider all those involved in the sector. I therefore voted in favour of the international agreement, which seeks to strengthen cooperation between producing and importing countries. This resolution will also facilitate the role of the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO), a structure which provides information on the global market and promotes cooperation between its member countries, as well as making global trade in cocoa fairer and more sustainable. While the new agreement aims to strengthen social and environmental responsibility, it does not, however, explicitly tackle the problem of child labour, which is dealt with in another report.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcomed the conclusion of this agreement. The cocoa sector is a crucial source of livelihoods for 50 million people worldwide. Africa is the world's largest cocoa producing region, from which the EU imports approximately 80% of cocoa consumed. This agreement is very important for the EU, which has the world's largest chocolate industry, and, being the world's principal importer of cocoa, the EU must bear a certain amount of responsibility for promoting the sustainability of this sector. I support this agreement's objectives, which are intended to ensure greater transparency in the cocoa sector and economic sustainability, and to ensure fair and transparent cocoa prices and incomes for cocoa producers, which would translate into significant benefits for small-scale farmers and communities in cocoa growing countries. I believe that given the concern over child exploitation in this sector, the EU must take the initiative and address this issue with the main cocoa producing countries in order to ban the exploitation of minors.

Regina Bastos (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Since the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, all agreements covering fields to which the ordinary legislative procedure applies are subject to Parliament's consent. This includes the EU's common commercial policy, of which the Cocoa Agreement 2010 forms part. This International Cocoa Agreement 2010 replaces the existing 2001 agreement and aims to create conditions for a fairer and more sustainable global cocoa trade by stepping up international cooperation between producers and consumers within the framework of the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO). It improves market transparency by enhancing the role of the ICCO in collecting, processing and distributing data, and its cooperation with industry and non-governmental

organisations. This new agreement sets out clear objectives for a sustainable cocoa economy, recognising the importance of economic viability and of social and environmental responsibility at all stages of the value chain. It also recognises the need to ensure fair cocoa prices and equitable returns, as well as to promote the quality of cocoa and develop food safety procedures. For these reasons, I voted for this recommendation that Parliament approve this agreement.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament recommendation because the new agreement intends to bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world. The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will replace the existing 2001 agreement to which the EU is a party. The new agreement will promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy. This agreement should contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of Member countries, strive towards obtaining fair prices leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers, and promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms. The 2010 agreement will improve market transparency by enhancing the role of the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO) in collecting, processing and distributing data and its cooperation with industry and NGOs. The new agreement will reinforce the ICCO's mandate for projects aimed at strengthening national cocoa economies' capacity and responsiveness to evolving demand. The new pact elaborates clear objectives for a sustainable cocoa economy, recognising the importance of economic viability and of social and environmental responsibility throughout all stages of the value chain.

Vito Bonsignore (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted for the report on the International Cocoa Agreement 2010. In 2010, the United Nations cocoa conference agreed on the new text, which effectively replaced the agreement of 2001. It represents an important step forwards as it proposes to bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world.

The agreement specifically aims to promote international cooperation in the global cocoa economy; to provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector; to contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of Member States; to strive towards obtaining fair prices leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers; to promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms; and to promote transparency in the world cocoa economy and the elimination of trade barriers. The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will therefore have a positive impact on all actors participating in the cocoa economy and I hope that it will also translate into tangible long-term benefits for smallholders and their communities.

Lara Comi (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I decided to vote in favour of the report on the approval of the International Cocoa Agreement 2010. I believe that Europe must act responsibly in order to ensure that the global market in cocoa should be fair and sustainable, both socially and environmentally, and guarantee an end product of high quality, not least for the reason that we Europeans are the major consumers of chocolate in the world. I also believe that encouraging small, local businesses to produce cocoa is worthwhile, and I consider that this would lead to a quality product and, at the same time, present many countries with an opportunity for sustainable development. I should finally like to emphasise the importance of promoting greater international cooperation and more dialogue between all stakeholders.

Christine De Veyrac (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this International Cocoa Agreement as it establishes rules of transparency in the exploitation of cocoa and focuses on strengthening the capacity of small local producers with the aim of reducing poverty.

Ioan Enciu (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the European Parliament consent to the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 because it defines improvements to the social and market sustainability of the cocoa production industry, establishing a fair balance between prices for consumers and producers. The European Union is one of the main importers of cocoa beans: therefore, we both have the need and the responsibility to get involved in the multilateral process of international market regulation. I very positively welcomed the decision to link the adoption of the agreement to a resolution and a Commission statement on child labour in the cocoa sector: the issue certainly merits separate treatment, given its crucial relevance in the field of children's rights. We urgently must take the direction of a total ban on child labour in trade.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 is of the greatest importance in the context of the international cocoa trade and the world cocoa economy. Since the agreement is valid for 10 years, it is therefore essential that there be a suitable forum for debating all matters relating to cocoa among the signatory governments, as well as with the private sector. The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 is key to the viability and development of cocoa producing countries, contributing to the sustainability of their economies by facilitating fair prices which enable equitable revenue for producers and consumers and, ultimately, promoting transparency in the world cocoa economy.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) This recommendation, drafted by Mr Moreira, deals with the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 by the EU. Conclusion of this agreement has been delayed, owing to the widespread use of child labour in this sector. West Africa produces 70% of the world's cocoa and about 7.5 million people work in cocoa production in that region, almost exclusively on family smallholdings. This facilitates recourse to child labour, in a society in which there are neither alternatives for wealth creation nor opportunities for young people once they have finished school. The majority of chocolate consumed in Europe is produced using child labour. Since defending values, namely, human rights and, in particular, children's rights, is one of the core values of the EU, it cannot establish commercial ties with organisations or countries which exploit child labour. I voted for this report because not only does it strongly condemn the use of child labour in cocoa fields, but it also urges the governments of the countries involved in this issue to ratify and/or comply with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will replace the existing 2001 agreement, which, in turn, replaced that of 1993; the first was established in 1972. The EU is a party to this agreement. Among the stated aims of the new agreement are: to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy; to contribute to strengthening the national cocoa economies of member countries; to strive towards obtaining fair prices, leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers; to advocate the abolition of trade barriers; to promote and to encourage consumption of chocolate and cocoa-based products; and to encourage members to enhance cocoa quality.

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of this multilateral forum, it is important to emphasise a fundamental observation. In the various forms that this agreement has taken over the years, underlying it, there has always been a vision – and a reality – founded on an international division of labour that is deeply disadvantageous to developing countries, which are considered mere producers and exporters of cheap raw materials and prevented from rising up the sector's value chain, and whose economies remain heavily dependent and lacking in diversity. That the objectives of this agreement advocate free trade does nothing to change this fundamental viewpoint, but rather reinforces it.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will replace the existing 2001 agreement. The new agreement's objectives are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy, to provide an appropriate framework for discussion among governments and with the private sector on all matters relating to cocoa, to contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of Member countries, and to strive towards obtaining fair prices that lead to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers. Overall, the agreement intends to bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world. The International Cocoa Organisation will administer the provisions and supervise the operation of this agreement.

Cocoa as a crop is farmed on over 8 million hectares of tropical land in 40 countries, and travels through a long and complex global supply chain from producers via traders, exporters, processors, chocolate manufacturers and retailers to consumers. Being the world's main importer and consumer of cocoa and home to its largest processors and chocolate manufacturers, the EU bears a large share of responsibility for increasing the sustainability of this sector.

I believe that the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will have a positive impact on all actors participating in the cocoa economy. I therefore think that Parliament should give its consent to its conclusion.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) This agreement will promote greater transparency in a continuously expanding market with continuously growing demand and provide more room for projects aimed at supporting national cocoa economies and their capacity to meet this demand. It also contains proposals to pursue the objectives of a sustainable cocoa economy and to promote the quality of cocoa, and highlights the need to develop food safety procedures as well as to secure fair prices and equitable returns. That is why I voted in favour.

Louis Grech (S&D), *in writing*. – Accepting the International Cocoa Agreement is a positive step towards providing more fair and sustainable global trade in cocoa. This agreement will support efforts to achieve this goal by working towards abolishing the exploitation of children in the cocoa sector. Unfortunately, children play a large role in the harvesting of cocoa beans and are put under hazardous health conditions while doing so. I want to see an end to the use of child labour, child slavery and all forms of child abuse. Since the EU is one of the largest importers of cocoa, we have the ability to help make just changes in the global community. Moving forward, we will need a strong coherence between EU policies and a holistic approach that can eliminate the causes of child labour in the cocoa sector.

Philippe Juvin (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I supported this report, which intends to bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) I would like to support the consent granted to the Cocoa Agreement. Europe is dependent on imports of this product, which cannot be grown in Europe itself, and cocoa is not something which is so necessary to us that we have to change this situation.

However, the conditions under which cocoa is produced are disturbing. This is nothing to do with health conditions or quality issues, but is about the way in which the work of children is used. Minors are being made to work too hard in relation to their capabilities, not to mention the fact that they are doing this instead of going to school or playing, activities which are normal for their European peers. It is difficult, but not impossible, to change this situation. Importers could force their suppliers to use workers of a more appropriate age, and could inspect cocoa fields and make continued trade conditional on respect for these rules. The European Union is a guardian of human rights throughout the world. We cannot forget this, and we must protect those who are weakest.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the report by Mr Moreira on the new International Cocoa Agreement 2010, which replaces the previous agreement ratified in 2001. With the new agreement, the intention is to have a more collaborative relationship between producers and consumers so as to enable an agreement to be reached on greater production and market guarantees for producers. Bearing in mind that the sector in question employs more than 50 million people, it was necessary to reach a new agreement that took into timely consideration the changed international arrangements affecting the structure of cocoa supply to a greater or lesser degree. Consequently, the concern over the use of child labour is equally important. In this sector, as in others, we must combat child labour ever more decisively. This is an issue that ought to have been examined properly in a report of its own.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this agreement. The 2010 International Cocoa Agreement will replace the existing 2001 agreement, to which the EU is a party. The new agreement's objectives are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy; provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector; contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of member countries; strive towards obtaining fair prices, leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers; promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms; promote transparency in the world cocoa economy through the collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant statistics and the undertaking of appropriate studies; strive for the elimination of trade barriers; promote and encourage the consumption of chocolate and cocoa-based products; and encourage members to enhance cocoa quality. Overall, the agreement intends to bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods throughout the world depend.

Iosif Matula (PPE), *in writing*. – As the cocoa trade is vulnerable to exploitation in various forms, having a framework in place that protects both producers and consumers is important. Therefore, I am in favour of the renewal of the International Cocoa Agreement. Cocoa consumption in developed countries, especially in Europe, is higher than in the developing countries where it is grown. In return for the privilege of reaping the economic

benefits of selling this commodity, Europe must be prepared to abide by certain standards. In order for this market to sustain itself, efforts dedicated to environmental protection need to be maintained. Responsible growing and harvesting practices must be respected. In addition, cocoa producers need to be adequately remunerated. It is much too easy in a system like this to ensure that the majority of the profits wind up in the hands of the people who simply market the product, not in the hands of those who actually produce it. Certainly, in order for these and other standards not mentioned here to be met, transparency is key. Consumers are more than ever concerned with the weight of their spending power. This agreement has the potential to respond to the needs of the globalised world.

Mario Mauro (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Greater efficiency, but also more transparency and sustainability are an absolute priority for a sector on which more than 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world. I am in favour of the text and the objectives of the agreement, from which a great number of actors participating in the cocoa sector will benefit.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This new agreement, which will replace the 2001 agreement, has the following objectives: to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy; to provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector; to contribute to strengthening the national cocoa economies of member countries; to strive to obtain fair prices, leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers; to promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms; to promote transparency in the world cocoa economy through the collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant statistics and the undertaking of appropriate studies; to strive for the elimination of trade barriers; to promote and to encourage consumption of chocolate and cocoa-based products; and to encourage members to enhance cocoa quality. Since the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, all agreements covering areas to which the ordinary legislative procedure applies are subject to Parliament's consent. This includes the EU's common commercial policy, of which the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 forms part.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing.* – In 2010, the United Nations cocoa conference concluded the negotiations of a new International Cocoa Agreement, which will replace the agreement signed in 2001. The European Union, being one of the largest importers of cocoa beans, is one of the main partners to this agreement. This agreement needs to be ratified by the European Parliament.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) In addition to my previous comments in support of the report on the conclusion of the International Cocoa Agreement and the resolution on child labour in the cocoa sector, I would stress that the extraction of cocoa seeds remains a labour intensive activity as the mechanical cutting often damages the seeds. I supported this report on the International Cocoa Agreement 2010, but we have to remain vigilant because numerous reports have highlighted the fact that cocoa farmers continue to use child labour on cocoa farms. Moreover, the International Labour Organisation estimates that more than 215 million children around the world are child labourers.

Katarína Nevedálová (S&D), *in writing.* – (SK) Since the European Parliament carries weight in the negotiations on the new International Cocoa Agreement thanks to the status of the EU as the largest importer of cocoa and one of the main partners in the agreement, under no circumstances must we allow minors to participate in work in the agriculture sector, including the cultivation of cocoa. It is physically dangerous work for children in an environment and under conditions that are totally unsuitable, when they should be

going to school. Forced labour, slavery and human trafficking cannot be forgiven under any circumstances.

I therefore support the rapporteur and congratulate him on this marvellous initiative in which our consent to the international agreement would be conditional upon the ending of child labour in this sector. It is also necessary to view this issue from a broader perspective and to seek ways of monitoring the child labour situation worldwide. I therefore urge the Commission to take up this initiative.

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) The cocoa industry provides a living for 50 million people worldwide. Therefore, we must promote increased transparency and sustainability in this sector of the economy. The International Cocoa Agreement supports fair prices which enable producers and consumers in the cocoa value chain to earn a reasonable income. In addition, we must guarantee more transparency in the world cocoa economy by compiling and analysing the relevant statistics and studies. On 25 June 2010, the United Nations cocoa conference, which is made up of the main cocoa producing and cocoa consuming countries, drew up the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 as a replacement for the 2001 version. The new agreement is valid for 10 years and can be extended twice for a period of two years. The 2010 agreement aims to lay the foundations for fairer and more sustainable cocoa trading worldwide. Therefore, I have voted in favour of this report.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution. I believe that this International Cocoa Agreement will be beneficial to the EU because the EU is a single contracting party, holding over half of importing members' votes in the International Cocoa Organisation. Above all, this agreement will promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms. It will also create conditions for fairer and more sustainable global trade in cocoa by strengthening international cooperation between producers and consumers. The provisions of the agreement will improve market transparency, will ensure fair cocoa prices, equitable returns and a good balance between cocoa supply and demand and will promote the quality of cocoa.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted in favour of the report because it marks an important step towards sustainable, fair, child labour-free cocoa production. The EU is the world's biggest cocoa consumer, accounting for 40% of global cocoa consumption in 2010, which gives us particular responsibility in this issue. By trading with cocoa producing countries, we bear a responsibility for millions of people for whom the industry is their livelihood. We provide them with jobs and allow minimum social standards. In Ghana and Ivory Coast, 90% of the farmers rely on cocoa for their primary income. However, by trading with these countries we are also responsible for child slavery. The situation of children in cocoa producing countries is horrifying. In the Ivory Coast alone, it is estimated that 100 000 children are put to work in the cocoa industry. The EU has an obligation to ensure child labour-free cocoa production. I welcome the promotion of fair-trade standards for cocoa, which include no forced labour of any kind, including child labour. I hope countries all over the world – in particular, the US, the second biggest cocoa consumer – will take the same approach.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this new agreement on cocoa, the main objectives of which are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy through an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector, thus contributing to strengthening the

national cocoa economies of the member countries. The aim of these measures is to strive to obtain fair prices, leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers; to promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms; and to promote transparency in the world cocoa economy.

Aldo Patriciello (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will replace the existing 2001 agreement, to which the EU is a party. Since the 2010 agreement aims to create conditions for fairer and more sustainable global trade in cocoa by strengthening international cooperation between producers and consumers within the framework of the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO) and improves transparency and sustainability in a sector on which 50 million people throughout the world rely for their livelihoods, I am voting in favour of the agreement.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Forming part of the EU's common commercial policy, the agreement aims to make the cocoa sector fairer, more transparent and more sustainable. This sector, on which 50 million livelihoods throughout the world depend, is essential to the EU's own economy, since the European chocolate industry is the largest in the world. The promotion of international cooperation in the world cocoa economy, the elimination of trade barriers, and the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable cocoa economy are some of the objectives sought in this agreement, for which I voted.

Crescenzo Rivellini (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I applaud Mr Moreira for his work. Having regard to the draft Council decision (09771/2011) and the draft International Cocoa Agreement 2010 (08134/2011), the recommendation approved today represents Parliament's firm conviction that the International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will have a positive impact on all the players involved in the cocoa industry. It is also to be hoped that this agreement will translate into effective and long-term benefits for smallholders and their communities. By approving it, Parliament has also highlighted the issue of child labour in cocoa production, another problem that urgently needs be brought to the attention of the European Union, and which requires decisive action.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing.* – In favour. The 2010 International Cocoa Agreement will replace the existing 2001 agreement, to which the EU is a party. The new agreement's objectives are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy; to provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector; to contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of member countries; to strive to obtain fair prices leading to equitable economic returns for both producers and consumers; to promote an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable cocoa economy; to promote transparency in the world cocoa economy through the collection, analysis and dissemination of relevant statistics and the undertaking of appropriate studies; to strive to eliminate trade barriers; to promote and to encourage the consumption of chocolate and cocoa-based products; to encourage members to enhance cocoa quality. Overall, the agreement aims to bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world. The International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO), established in 1973 and located in London, UK, will administer the provisions and supervise the operation of this agreement. All parties to the agreement are members of the ICCO.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted in favour of this text because I consider it essential to achieve the objectives of the new International Cocoa Agreement 2010 and

to encourage cooperation within the global economy on this raw material in particular. The objective must be to create conditions for fairer and more sustainable global trade by strengthening international cooperation between producers and consumers within the framework of the International Cocoa Organisation. It should also bring more transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world.

Oreste Rossi (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) I am in favour of the recommendation on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the International Cocoa Agreement 2010, an important and significant step for international trade that aims to strengthen the national cocoa economies of Member States, including on a global level. The merits of this agreement include recognition of the need to ensure fair prices and equitable economic returns, while complying with sustainable policies in environmental, economic and social terms and transparency requirements, in order to enhance cocoa quality and develop food safety procedures that protect the final consumer. I also believe that the focus on child labour in cocoa fields is important, as this is a significant problem that deserves adequate recognition and protection in a special resolution.

Tokia Saïfi (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) The agreement adopted today replaces and improves the agreement in place since 2001. I supported its adoption because it will help to improve the sector's transparency and sustainability. It will provide for a more efficient and inclusive governing structure of the ICCO, the International Cocoa Organisation, on which the EU sits. The European Union is the world's main importer and consumer of cocoa, and home to its major processors and chocolate manufacturers. It has a considerable responsibility to improve the sustainability of the cocoa sector. This issue has been debated several times in this House, which is why we decided to adopt at the same time a resolution on the sector's recurring problem: child labour. This text will form a working basis for the members of the ICCO and will act as a point of reference for monitoring the progress made by the parties involved.

Matteo Salvini (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 seems to take into due account both the interests of producer countries and the equally legitimate interests of the countries where the product is transformed and used in the food industry. This is why I voted in favour.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The aims of the new International Cocoa Agreement are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy, to provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector, and to contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of member countries. With this vote, we are striving to obtain fair prices leading to equitable economic returns for producers and consumers. For this to happen, we need to promote a sustainable cocoa economy in economic, social and environmental terms. It will also eliminate trade barriers to promoting and encouraging the consumption of chocolate and cocoa-based products. The International Cocoa Agreement 2010 will have a positive impact on all actors participating in the cocoa economy and it is to be hoped that it will also translate into tangible long-term benefits for small-scale farmers and their communities.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The International Cocoa Agreement 2010, which will replace the 2001 Cocoa Agreement and was adopted at the 2010 UN cocoa conference, brings together the world's leading cocoa producing and cocoa consuming countries,

including the EU. This agreement aims to create conditions for fairer and more sustainable global trade in cocoa, by stepping up international cooperation within the framework of the International Cocoa Organisation, whose powers this agreement strengthens. I am voting to approve this agreement as I consider it important to establish rules and rethink strategies for this sector, upon which the livelihoods of 50 million people depend.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the recommendation on the draft Council decision on the conclusion of the International Cocoa Agreement 2010. Being the main importer and consumer of cocoa, the EU bears a large share of responsibility for increasing the sustainability of the cocoa production sector. The 2010 agreement aims to create the conditions required for fairer global trade in cocoa, which is more sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. The new agreement's objectives are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa production sector; to provide an appropriate framework for discussion on all cocoa matters among governments and with the private sector; to strengthen the national cocoa production sectors in member countries; to strive towards obtaining fair prices leading to equitable returns for both producers and consumers. The agreement is aimed at introducing greater transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world. I think that the agreement will have a positive impact on all the actors participating in the cocoa production sector and will translate into tangible long-term benefits for both smallholder farmers and their communities.

Marie-Christine Vergiat (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted for the Moreira recommendation approving the conclusion of the International Cocoa Agreement 2010. The conclusion in question talks about an agreement with the three biggest cocoa producers in the world and reinforces the mandate of the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO) with a view to enabling cooperation between all the actors, as well as collecting, processing and distributing data.

The agreement does not forget the economic and social needs of these countries, recognising the need to ensure fair prices and promote improvements in terms of development. Allowing the European Union to influence the development conditions of Southern countries as a key importer could enable it to take action against the impoverishment of the populations, against child labour, and in favour of social development.

The European Parliament's position is a step in the right direction. We can only hope that this will not be another great declaration of intent that the actors, starting with the Member States, completely fail to take into account. The gap between talk and action is becoming increasingly unbearable, particularly in terms of North/South relations.

Iva Zanicchi (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The main objectives of the text on the new International Cocoa Agreement are to promote international cooperation in the world cocoa economy, and to contribute to the strengthening of the national cocoa economies of member countries. Overall, I believe the agreement will bring greater transparency and sustainability into a sector on which 50 million livelihoods depend throughout the world. Cocoa growing provides revenue for growing, processing and consumer countries and it is important to remember that the European chocolate industry is the largest worldwide. I voted in favour of Mr Moreira's report for these reasons.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) While we believe that there are a number of positive aspects of this international agreement, which is already several years old, we wish to emphasise that it has always been based on the reality of an international

division of labour that is deeply disadvantageous to developing countries, which are considered mere producers and exporters of cheap raw materials and prevented from rising up the sector's value chain, and whose economies remain heavily dependent and lacking in diversity. In order to counter rather than reinforce this state of affairs, it was important not to include – as has been done – a defence of free trade in the objectives of the agreement.

Motion for a resolution: B7-0126/2012 and Recommendation: Vital Moreira (A7-0024/2012)

Alain Cadec (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I voted for the International Cocoa Agreement 2010. I am pleased with the improvements that it brings to the previous agreement in respect of health and working condition standards. The conclusion of this agreement by the European Union represents a real step forward for the cocoa industry. It is a balanced agreement which takes into account the interests of producers and consumers. It favours international cooperation, increases transparency in the sector and, ultimately, ensures that it has a sustainable future. Furthermore, I welcome the adoption of the resolution on child labour in the cocoa sector.

Anne Delvaux (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) The International Cocoa Agreement, the main agreement on basic commodities between exporters and importers of cocoa, aims to make global trade in cocoa fairer and more sustainable. Nonetheless, the new agreement did not, however, tackle the problem of child labour. That is why Parliament adopted a resolution calling for measures against the use of child labour in this sector. Cocoa cultivation is a highly labour intensive activity: 90% of world cocoa is cultivated by 5.5 million smallholders, and 14 million rural workers directly depend on its production, including children. The resolution calls on all parties in the cocoa value chain to live up to their responsibilities in combating forced child labour and trafficking in the sector. Furthermore, Parliament calls on the Commission to come up with a legislative proposal to combat effectively cocoa-based products derived from child labour and to encourage those countries that are signatories to the agreement reached at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to act to guarantee traceability along the entire supply chain.

Motions for resolutions: RC - B7-0145/2012, B7-0146/2012, B7-0147/2012, B7-0148/2012

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this motion for a resolution, which makes provision, *inter alia*, for an EU diabetes strategy. I believe that this is of great importance, as it enables the collection and management of data on the epidemiology of diabetes, the coordination of European research on diabetes, and progress in the fields of diagnosis, education and prevention. Such an initiative makes a great deal of sense, especially considering that approximately 32 million Europeans suffer from the illness, while this number is continuing to grow, including in younger generations.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) Diabetes is one of the most prevalent chronic diseases affecting European citizens, thus putting health care and health insurance systems in European Union Member States under serious pressure. According to World Health Organisation data, the number of people living with diabetes in Europe has already exceeded 35 million and is expected to reach the critical level of 50 million by 2030. The sustained efforts of national health authorities and the improvement of the cooperation framework at EU level are essential for reversing these trends representing an extremely serious public health concern. Given that more than one third of newly detected cases of

diabetes could have been prevented by regular medical checks, coupled with healthy lifestyle and diet habits, I think that special emphasis should be laid on organising European awareness campaigns regarding factors facilitating or determining the onset of diabetes. For this reason, I voted in favour of the resolution.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) Today, 32 million Europeans between the ages of 20 and 79 suffer from diabetes and that figure is constantly growing. I followed closely the preparation of this report, which seeks to increase prevention, diagnosis, treatment and research. As a member of the EP's Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, I felt that it was crucial to develop a targeted European strategy to combat this disease. In addition, as a member of the new National Sports Council (CNS), created by the French Sports Minister, David Douillet, I believe that sport should form an integral part of the public policies to prevent diabetes and obesity. Several studies have revealed that Type 2 diabetes could be combated by effective prevention strategies focusing on the risk factors (such as poor and unbalanced diet, obesity, lack of physical activity and alcohol consumption). The European Commission has already set up an EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health and it has drawn up a strategy on diet and physical activity, but we need to go further in order to protect our children and ourselves from these diseases.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcomed this resolution. Almost 33 million EU citizens suffer from diabetes and it is estimated that the number of people with this disease will increase significantly in the decade ahead. In many Member States, spending on people suffering from the illness already accounts for more than 10% of all health care expenditure and, on average, treatment costs approximately EUR 2 100 per patient. Although the growing number of people with diabetes represents a serious threat to the Member States' health care systems and significantly increases their expenditure, only 14 EU Member States have national programmes to tackle diabetes. I welcome the resolution's call for the Commission to present an EU diabetes strategy and ensure its implementation in the Member States. The Member States must also take active steps to develop national diabetes programmes, which would promote healthy lifestyles, risk factor reduction, prevention, early diagnosis and methods of treating diabetes, and would provide the population, particularly people in high-risk groups, with detailed information.

Regina Bastos (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 32 million people in the European Union, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. Particularly worrying in the case of Portugal is the significant increase in the incidence of the illness among children and young people. Type 2 diabetes decreases life expectancy by five to 10 years, while Type 1 diabetes decreases life expectancy by around 20 years. Overall, 325 000 deaths per year are attributed to diabetes in the EU. In most Member States, diabetes is responsible for over 10% of health care expenditure. The reduction of risk factors, notably lifestyle habits, is increasingly recognised as a key prevention strategy for achieving reduced diabetes rates. I voted for this motion for a resolution because I believe the measures therein will make a positive contribution to diabetes prevention and to a reduction in the incidence of the disease among the public.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution because diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases. It is estimated that it affects more than 32 million EU citizens, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population, with an additional 32 million citizens suffering from impaired glucose tolerance and with a very high probability of progressing to clinically manifest diabetes. Diabetes is a leading cause of heart attacks, strokes, blindness, amputation

and kidney failure, if poorly managed or diagnosed too late. Unfortunately, there is a lack of funding and infrastructure to coordinate diabetes research in the EU, impacting negatively on the competitiveness of EU diabetes research and preventing people with diabetes in Europe from benefiting fully from research. The European Parliament therefore calls on the Commission to develop and implement a targeted EU diabetes strategy on diabetes prevention, diagnosis, management, education and research. The Member States should develop, implement and monitor national diabetes programmes, aimed at health promotion, risk factor reduction, improved prediction, prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of diabetes, targeting both the population at large and high-risk groups, and aimed at reducing inequalities and optimising health care resources.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) Unhealthy lifestyle has led, in recent years, to a real ‘diabetes epidemic’, the number of new cases increasing from month to month. Worldwide, it is estimated that the number of patients will increase from 194 million at present to 333 million by 2025. In the European Union, 31 million people, representing 8.6% of the population aged between 20 and 79 years, are suffering from diabetes. In Romania, there are 370 000 registered diabetics, their number increasing by 50 000 every year. However, diabetes specialists state that the real number of diabetics in Romania is double that. Diabetes is the leading cause of death in Europe, given that 80% of diabetics die from cardiovascular complications. Considering the above, I believe that an EU diabetes strategy with clear objectives regarding the prevention, diagnosis and management of the disease, along with education and research in this area, would be required.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing*. – (CS) In view of the fact that there is currently no European strategy for addressing diabetes, despite the Austrian Presidency Council Conclusions on ‘Promotion of healthy lifestyles and prevention of Type 2 diabetes’, I believe the Commission should draw up and introduce a targeted EU strategy in the area of diabetes, aimed at the diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, and education and research in this area. In this context, the Commission should draw up common standardised criteria and methods for collecting data on diabetes and, in cooperation with Member States, coordinate and collect, register, monitor and manage comprehensive diabetes epidemiological data and economic data based on the direct and indirect costs of diabetes prevention and treatment. The role of the Member States, on the other hand, should be to develop, implement and monitor national diabetes programmes, aimed at health promotion, reduction of risk factors, prediction, prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, targeting both the population at large and high-risk groups in particular. An important part of national strategies should be to promote prevention of the occurrence of Type 2 diabetes and obesity, particularly through healthy lifestyle training and physical activity at school from an early age.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 32 million people in the European Union, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. Particularly worrying, in the case of Portugal, is the increase in the incidence of the illness among children and young people. Type 2 diabetes decreases life expectancy by five to 10 years, while Type 1 diabetes decreases life expectancy by around 20 years. Overall, 325 000 deaths per year are attributed to diabetes in the EU. People living with diabetes must provide 95% of their own care, which has psycho-social consequences and an impact on the quality of life of their families. The reduction of risk factors, notably lifestyle habits, is increasingly crucial to reducing diabetes rates. I am voting for this motion for a resolution, because I believe the measures therein

will make a positive contribution to diabetes prevention and the reduction of the incidence of the disease among the public.

Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (PPE), *in writing*. – (SV) I voted in favour of the joint motion for a resolution on diabetes because it is important for us to raise awareness of one of the most widespread, chronic health problems that currently affects 32 million people in Europe. We need to tackle this problem by means of more knowledge, education, research and prevention. Health issues should preferably be dealt with at national level, but it is also a matter of increasing awareness of the consequences of diabetes throughout the EU. It is therefore important to improve cooperation between the Member States and encourage the creation of a strategy for diabetes in order to find more effective solutions for a disease that does not recognise borders. I particularly welcome the fact that the Danish Presidency has prioritised this issue.

Emer Costello (S&D), *in writing*. – I welcome the call on the Commission to prepare an EU-wide diabetes strategy, in the form of a Council recommendation. Diabetes is the leading cause of heart attacks and other serious illnesses and affects 32 million people between the ages of 20 and 79 in Europe. This number is expected to grow to over 16% of the total population by 2030 due to Europe's ageing population. Every year, 325 000 deaths in the EU are attributed to diabetes, or one every two minutes. Half of all people with diabetes are not aware that they have it. An EU strategy should focus on prevention, diagnosis, treatment and research. I would point out, as the Diabetes Federation of Ireland has done, that children with diabetes require supervision to maintain their diabetes management and to remain healthy. The need for diabetes management does not end while the child is at school. Any EU-wide strategy has to take account of this fact. I welcome the fact that the EU has spent over EUR 200 million on research into diabetes and obesity since 2007. We need to continue EU diabetes research, especially to identify the risk factors for Type 1 diabetes.

Mário David (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 32 million people in the European Union, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. Particularly worrying is the way in which it is currently spreading. In the case of Portugal, the incidence of the illness among children and young people is increasing significantly. Unfortunately, 95% of people with diabetes provide their own care, which has psycho-social consequences and an impact on the quality of life of their families. As a doctor and a law maker, I believe that prevention is of the utmost importance, as is stepping up research. This is not only true for diabetes, but also for other illnesses of the same kind, like high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases. It is therefore essential that the Member States, with support from the Commission, develop, implement and monitor national diabetes programmes, aimed at health promotion, risk factor reduction, prediction, prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment of diabetes, as well as at reducing inequalities and optimising resources. I voted for this motion for a resolution because I believe the measures therein will be able to make a positive contribution to reducing the incidence of diabetes in the EU.

Christine De Veyrac (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this resolution, which raises our awareness of the new blights on the health of our fellow citizens. The European Union must help to ensure the well-being of Europeans by developing all possible mechanisms to combat these diseases. Prevention, greater awareness among high-risk groups and increased research are just some of the actions that could be reinforced through the introduction of a real European strategy.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this resolution on addressing the EU diabetes epidemic since it argues that the EU needs to develop a strategy to address diabetes, which includes, *inter alia*, the collection and management of epidemiological data, cooperation on research, early diagnosis and prevention campaigns.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) According to the World Health Organisation, 86% of deaths in Europe are caused by non-communicable diseases, diabetes being among the most common. Although it cannot be dismissed as a behavioural illness, the truth is that it is associated with unhealthy lifestyle habits: tobacco, poor diet, lack of physical activity and alcohol. As such, there is an urgent need to develop policy areas that contribute to diabetes prevention, and to preventing its complications and economic and social costs. Countries must reduce the mortality rates associated with diabetes, if not its prevalence, and the Union can play an important role in this. This reduction must be achieved, not only through prevention hand in hand with campaigns promoting healthier lifestyles, but also through a very strong emphasis on the early diagnosis, detection and treatment of diabetes, factors known to be crucial in cutting mortality rates.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) This joint motion for a resolution, pursuant to Rule 110(4) of the Rules of Procedure, replacing the motions for resolutions of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, deals with urgently needed measures for reducing the diabetes epidemic in the European Union. The increase in life expectancy witnessed in recent decades has meant that there are more people with chronic illnesses, constituting a huge challenge for sufferers, their families and society. Diabetes is the fourth most common illness and accounts for around 10% of national health budgets. More than 30 million Europeans suffer from diabetes. Nonetheless, current therapies do not halt its progress, and their *modus operandi* has to involve early diagnosis and prevention, as well as a commitment to research, obviously. In fact, Type 2 diabetes can be avoided by maintaining a balanced diet and doing physical exercise. I voted for this joint motion for a resolution, since I believe that the measures proposed will enable a significant reduction in diabetes rates, improving the public's quality of life and significantly reducing their treatment costs.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million people in the European Union, and this is expected to increase by about 16.6% by 2030 as a result of the obesity epidemic and the ageing of the European population.

This resolution presents important data for characterising the reality of this disease in the EU and indicates ways forward with which we agree, specifically with regard to prevention at different levels, the improvement and promotion of research and the collection of data about diabetes. However, in this context, we believe it is necessary to uphold the importance of public health services in the fight against, and prevention of, this and many other diseases, particularly at the primary care level. Unfortunately, this resolution does not do this, as was called for. The resolution suggests it is necessary to collect 'economic data based on the direct and indirect costs of diabetes prevention and management', an approach which, in the context of the known and real growing pressure for privatisation in the area of health, cannot fail to arouse some concern.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens, with an additional 32 million citizens suffering from impaired glucose tolerance and highly likely to progress to clinically manifest diabetes. According to estimates, the number of people living with diabetes in Europe will increase by 16.6% by 2030, in particular, as a result of the obesity epidemic and the ageing of the European population.

No cures are currently available for diabetes. The complications associated with Type 2 diabetes can be prevented through the promotion of a healthy lifestyle and, above all, early diagnosis, since often, up to 50% of all people with diabetes are unaware of their condition.

In this context, I believe that it would be justified for Member States to develop, implement and monitor national diabetes programmes aimed at health promotion, the reduction of risk factors, and the prediction, prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, targeting both the population at large and high-risk groups in particular. With a view to achieving objectives relating to non-communicable diseases and addressing problems in the area of public health, social issues and the economy, it is no less important for the EU and the Member States to further integrate prevention and risk-factor reduction into all relevant legislative and policy fields.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the European Parliament's resolution on addressing the European Union's diabetes epidemic, which calls on the Commission to develop and implement a targeted European strategy on diabetes prevention, diagnosis, education and research, and calls on the Member States to implement national diabetes programmes, focusing on prevention. Diabetes affects almost 10% of Europe's population and this figure is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030. It is therefore necessary for the EU to adopt a European strategy to complement the national efforts in order to provide ongoing financial support for research and encourage early diagnosis of the disease.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of this resolution, which emphasises diabetes prevention, diagnosis and research. Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, affecting more than 32 million EU citizens.

It is important to distinguish between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes as distinct diseases. Research is still needed to clearly identify risk factors and genetic predisposition for Type 1 diabetes.

With regard to Type 2 diabetes, the causes have been identified. Up to 80% of Type 2 diabetes could, however, be avoided by eliminating the risk factors for these diseases (smoking, poor diet, lack of physical activity, alcohol abuse). The resolution goes on to recommend strategies to be implemented from an early age through education about healthy dietary and physical activity habits in schools.

Significant progress in terms of health care, along with a healthier lifestyle, will ensure improved quality of life for people with an early diagnosis of diabetes.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) For many years, I have been involved in work in my region on behalf of people living with diabetes. So I am all the more pleased that this problem, which is growing so rapidly, has become the subject of discussion in the European Parliament. Not only are very many of the EU's citizens affected by this disease, but also the number of people at risk of developing it is significant and increasing,

so it is very important to raise awareness of this disease. We must tackle this problem, and methods of fighting diabetes which are more innovative will definitely be needed.

It will be important to develop a suitable strategy on diabetes, and this will include early diagnosis and research in this area. It is essential to analyse data on the disease and those who live with it so that we can understand the problem and be able to find a solution or reduce it significantly. This will need action not only from the EU institutions, but chiefly from the Member States, in particular, when developing programmes to combat diabetes. Furthermore, the Member States should include preventative measures to enable the control of chronic diseases. Diabetes should be seen as a priority social challenge, and the strategy for combating this disease should be supported with appropriate funding.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcomed this resolution because almost 75% of all people with diabetes are not in good control of their condition, leading to an increased risk of complications, productivity loss and greater costs for society. These costs will inevitably increase given the rising number of people with diabetes, the ageing of the population and the associated rise in multiple comorbidities. Only 16 out of 27 Member States have a national framework or programme in place to tackle diabetes, and there are no clear criteria with regard to what constitutes a good programme or which countries have the best practices. There are considerable differences and inequalities in the quality of diabetes treatment within the EU. The Member States must develop, implement and monitor national diabetes programmes aimed at health promotion, risk factor reduction and the prediction, prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of diabetes, targeting both the population at large and high-risk groups, and designed to reduce inequalities and optimise health care resources. In order to achieve non-communicable disease-related objectives and address public health, social and economic challenges, it is important for the EU and the Member States to further integrate prevention and risk-factor reduction into all relevant legislative and policy fields and, in particular, into their environmental, food and consumer policies

Livia Járóka (PPE), *in writing.* – Diabetes, one of the most common of non-communicable diseases, is directly responsible for the death of 325 000 EU-citizens every year and the shocking decrease by 5-20 years of the life expectancy for 32 million people, earning its nickname as the silent assassin. Diabetes and the related impaired glucose intolerance demands more than 10% of total national health care expenditures and researchers expect a 16.6% increase in the number of people living with diabetes by 2030 and consequently a growing burden on health care systems. Despite these alarming figures, however, only 14 of the 27 EU Member States have developed their national programmes to tackle the disease and its consequences and, despite the initiatives of the Austrian Presidency in 2006, the European Parliament and the UN, there is still no EU level strategy to address the issue. The Commission must develop a targeted strategy for the effective prevention, diagnosis, management and research of diabetes and to present specific recommendations for Member States to support the development of national diabetes programmes. Reliable data collection, standardised criteria for data processing and health education are also necessary, since diabetes can be effectively addressed by identifying the risk factors and promoting prevention strategies.

Philippe Juvin (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I supported the joint resolution on addressing the diabetes epidemic in the European Union. This resolution was supported by a large majority in the European Parliament and I welcome that.

Giovanni La Via (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) Diabetes is one of the most widespread and commonest threats to EU citizens in terms of non-communicable diseases. According to estimates, one tenth of the EU population is now affected by the disease. Given the progressive ageing of the population, we have also got to remember that this figure is set to rise, with predictions as high as 16% in 2030. As a result, I think we need to take practical steps to respond to this threat and that one of the priority actions should be the decision to focus on prevention and education. EU citizens need to be even better informed about the possible consequences that their lifestyle, dietary and social choices can have on their lives, as well as the simple rules to follow in order to avoid the onset of diabetes. Meanwhile, aside from prevention, greater information is also required during the management of the disease. Indeed, some studies show that 75% of sufferers are not treating themselves as they should. Investing in research and focusing on prevention and a widespread education campaign are the initiatives that we need to put in place as soon as possible in order to reduce the impact of this disease on the European population.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), *in writing.* – (RO) According to statistics, almost 285 million people are diagnosed with this disease worldwide, of which approximately 55.2 million are in Europe. Worldwide estimates for 2030 indicate 438 million patients. However, treatment involves high levels of expenditure – in the US alone, this figure was USD 210 billion in one year, an amount anticipated to exceed USD 300 billion by 2025, given that the solution for diabetes is not medical but social.

Diet and lifestyle play an essential role in preventing chronic degenerative diseases such as Type 2 diabetes. The prevention of this misleading disease should begin from an early age. We have clear studies proving that it is enough to lose 3-4 kg in weight by fast walking for 30 minutes a day to reduce the incidence of diabetes by nearly two thirds. Considering all this, Member States should promote Type 2 diabetes prevention through education about healthy eating and exercise habits in schools. There is also a need to align food-related policies in order to promote a healthy diet and to allow consumers to opt for healthy products.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted for this resolution, which calls on the Commission to develop and implement a targeted EU diabetes strategy in the form of a Council recommendation on diabetes prevention, diagnosis, management, education and research and to draw up common, standardised criteria and methods for data collection on diabetes, and, in collaboration with the Member States, to coordinate, collect, register, monitor and manage comprehensive epidemiological data on diabetes and economic data on the direct and indirect costs of diabetes prevention and management.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE), *in writing.* – Nearly 10% of the total EU population – an estimated 32 million citizens – are affected by diabetes in the EU. The number of people living with diabetes in Europe is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030. I voted in favour of this joint motion for a resolution calling for a targeted EU-wide diabetes strategy to address these worrying statistics.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 32 million people in the European Union, according to estimates, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. On top of this, the same number of citizens suffer from impaired glucose tolerance and have a very high probability of progressing to clinically manifest diabetes. Unfortunately, a 16% increase in the number of people living with diabetes in Europe is expected by 2030, as a result of the obesity

epidemic, the ageing of the European population and other factors yet to be determined. It is known that Type 2 diabetes decreases life expectancy by five to 10 years and that Type 1 diabetes decreases life expectancy by around 20 years. Overall, 325 000 deaths per year are attributed to diabetes in the EU; that is, one European every two minutes. The reduction of identified risk factors, notably, lifestyle habits, is increasingly being recognised as a key prevention strategy able to reduce the incidence, prevalence and complications for both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. As such, the factors mentioned in this motion for a resolution are key to effectively combating the diabetes epidemic.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases and affects more than 32 million EU citizens. Diabetes is a major issue for our society. In one decade, the number of people living with diabetes has skyrocketed. Unfortunately, there is currently no treatment to cure diabetes. In addition, many diabetic patients are the victims of discrimination and prejudice is still rife in schools, employment agencies and workplaces, and also in terms of insurance policies, for which the premiums for an appropriate level of cover are often exorbitant. The Commission must urgently define and implement a targeted EU diabetes strategy and support the actions of Member States. Member States must develop national diabetes programmes and promote Type 2 diabetes and obesity prevention through strategies to be implemented from an early age through education about healthy dietary and physical activity habits in schools. Patients must have access to health care and diabetes treatments.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing.* – Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens. The resolution asks for a targeted EU diabetes strategy, collection and management of diabetes epidemiological data, coordination of European diabetes research, and early diagnosis and education-based prevention campaigns. We also should draw up a financial plan to fight diabetes. In favour.

Andreas Mølzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) Diabetes is one of the most widespread non-communicable diseases in Europe. According to estimates, more than 32 million EU citizens, constituting nearly 10% of the European population, are affected by it. The main reasons for this are, on the one hand, the ageing population, which is why we can expect an increase of 16% by 2030, and, on the other, unhealthy lifestyle habits, such as poor nutrition and too little exercise. Since we still do not have a cure for diabetes, people need to reconsider their lifestyles and eat more healthily and participate in more sport. By these means, it would be possible to prevent at least some people from acquiring the disease. I abstained from voting because I believe that each Member State should find national solutions to diabetes according to its means in the health and insurance sector.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I voted in favour of the resolution and I would like to mention the five priority actions identified by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food for placing nutrition at the heart of food systems in the developed and developing world: taxing unhealthy products; regulating foods high in saturated fats, salt and sugar; cracking down on junk food advertising; overhauling misguided agricultural subsidies that make certain ingredients cheaper than others; and supporting local food production so that consumers have access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing.* – (LT) I welcome this resolution because only through joint efforts can we effectively combat the diabetes epidemic which is constantly spreading at a rapid rate. Consequently, an EU-wide diabetes strategy must be developed and

implemented. Furthermore, all Member States must develop and implement their own national diabetes programmes and effectively implement Type 2 diabetes and obesity prevention, as well as diabetes management guidelines based on best practices and evidence-based treatment guidelines. As the number of people with diabetes is continually on the increase, I believe that the Commission should draw up common standardised criteria and methods for data collection on diabetes. It is also very important for the Commission, in constructive collaboration with the Member States, to manage comprehensive epidemiological data on diabetes as well as economic data on the direct and indirect costs of diabetes prevention and management. It is also crucial for sufficient funding to be allocated to the fight against diabetes.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 32 million people in the European Union, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. It also accounts for over 10% of health care expenditure. Particularly worrying in the case of Portugal is the significant increase in the incidence of the illness among children and young people. I voted for this motion for a resolution, as I believe that the measures proposed will make a positive contribution to prevention and the reduction of diabetes rates, particularly through a policy of reducing risk factors, including a change in lifestyle.

Alojz Peterle (PPE), *in writing.* – (SL) I voted in favour of this proposal for a joint resolution because I firmly believe that we need to pay more attention to the increasing incidence of this disease both within Member States and at the level of the whole European Union. I also voted in the hope that in the future, we will be more dedicated to addressing the broader causes of the thus far uncontrolled spread of this disease.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease, affecting more than 32 million people in the European Union, according to estimates, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. As such, in order to reduce the incidence of the disease, it is necessary to adopt a strategy of prevention, diagnosis and management, and to make use of new technologies in the field of research. However, the most important role must be carried out by the people themselves, in that they must behave responsibly. Better eating habits and increased physical exercise are essential in this area.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), *in writing.* – (FR) On 29 February, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety unanimously adopted my report on the new regulation on specific foods. This was an opportunity to mention one obvious fact: the 32 million EU citizens affected by diabetes must receive our full attention, but this does not necessarily require specific food standards.

However, we must establish an EU strategy to combat diabetes which is expected to increase by 16% by 2030 as a result of the obesity epidemic and the ageing of the European population. The resolution adopted this afternoon on this non-communicable disease, which is responsible for 325 000 deaths per year in Europe, is a welcome one. Or perhaps it would be more appropriate to talk about two diseases. While the risk factors for Type 2 diabetes, such as poor and unbalanced diet, obesity, lack of physical activity and alcohol consumption have been clearly identified, we still have a long way to go to do the same for Type 1 diabetes. However, there do seem to be certain common factors: genetic predisposition and early appearance and diagnosis of the disease particularly between the ages of five and 15. That is reason enough for us to continue to provide more funding for research and collect data on diabetes.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – Abstention. We Greens/EFA have not tabled any resolution on the diabetes epidemic, and as such are not participating in the joint resolution, for the following reasons: the resolution was asked for by the EPP and ALDE despite the fact that Parliament had adopted a comprehensive resolution on non-communicable diseases, including diabetes, less than six months ago, and we normally try to avoid pandering to the interests of specific diseases; it circumvented ENVI as the committee responsible. It was prepared by the European Coalition for Diabetes and the EU Diabetes Working Group, both of which are largely, if not entirely, financed for their work and/or expenses by pharmaceutical companies.

Oreste Rossi (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens and on the rise, especially among children. I believe that in order to clearly identify the risk factors, it is important to carry out and implement research and promote prevention and awareness policies. In addition, it is important to elaborate common, standardised criteria and methods for data collection on diabetes and, in collaboration with the Member States, to coordinate, collect, monitor and manage diabetes epidemiological data, as well as data on the direct and indirect costs of diabetes prevention and management, given that there is currently no definitive cure.

Since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union has extended its area of competence to include health care, and I believe that it is appropriate to promote the exchange of best practices between Member States, improving the coordination of European research work into diabetes and encouraging inter-disciplinary collaboration. I therefore voted in favour of the resolution text.

Nikolaos Salavrakos (EFD), *in writing*. – (EL) Information on, prevention of and research into diabetes are vital to the health of European citizens. I consider that cooperation between the Member States on this issue and possibly a European strategy on diabetes with specific targets will help to reduce inequalities and ensure that better use is made of public health resources.

Olga Sehnalová (S&D), *in writing*. – (CS) Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, affecting more than 32 million EU citizens, according to estimates, which is about 10% of the total population of the EU. Due to the obesity epidemic, the ageing European population and other factors not yet determined, the number of diabetics living in Europe is expected to rise by 16.6% by 2030. The adopted resolution, which I supported, calls for the introduction of a European strategy for diabetes, addressing, among other things, the collection and assessment of epidemiological data, coordination of European research and educational prevention campaigns aimed at early diagnosis. I consider all of these activities an essential foundation for the fight against this disease.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens, representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. Due to the spread of obesity, the ageing of the European population and other factors yet to be determined, the number of people living with diabetes in Europe is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030. This vote lays the foundations for developing and implementing a targeted EU strategy on diabetes prevention, diagnosis, management, education and research. We need to elaborate common, standardised criteria and methods for data collection on diabetes and for the creation of tools to ensure coordination between Member States. Accordingly, Member States must

develop, implement and monitor national diabetes programmes aimed at health promotion, risk factor reduction, prediction, prevention, early diagnosis and the treatment of diabetes.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Diabetes is the most common non-communicable disease in the EU, and is estimated to affect more than 32 million people. It causes approximately 325 000 deaths per year and this figure is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030. I support this motion for a resolution, which aims to promote the creation of a specific strategy for diabetes in the European Union, to set out common, standardised criteria and methods for data collection on diabetes, and to promote national programmes aimed at improving health and reducing risk factors. It is important to highlight that an exchange of best practices on the programmes created by the different Member States should be encouraged, and that the Commission should continuously monitor progress regarding the Member States' implementation of national diabetes programmes.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted for the motion for a resolution on addressing the EU diabetes epidemic, given that diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens, representing nearly 10% of the EU population. According to the statistics, the number of people living with diabetes in Europe is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030, as a result of the obesity epidemic and the ageing of the population. I call on Member States to promote the prevention of Type 2 diabetes and obesity through healthy lifestyle strategies, targeting diet and physical exercise, as well as education in schools about healthy eating habits and physical activity.

Only 16 of the 27 Member States have a national framework or a specific programme for resolving the problem of diabetes. Given that there are considerable differences and inequalities in the quality of diabetes treatment within the EU, I call on Member States to provide continued patient access to diabetes treatments and technologies, including e-health technologies. I urge the Commission to devise and implement an EU diabetes strategy with clear objectives regarding prevention, diagnosis, treatment, education and research in the area of diabetes.

Viktor Uspaskich (ALDE), *in writing.* – (LT) The rapporteur reminds us of the severity of the diabetes epidemic in Europe. In the European Union, 325 000 people die from diabetes each year, in other words two people every two minutes. Research by Vilnius University has shown that diabetes-related mortality has grown constantly in Lithuania over the last two decades. As the report shows, this disease is mostly associated with obesity. The rate of obesity in Lithuania is over 20%, the second highest rate in the European Union, and 5% more than the Union average. According to a report published by the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 50.1% of Europeans are obese, twice as many as 20 years ago. Diabetes and obesity cost human health and health care systems dear. In their report, the European Commission and the OECD indicate that they have calculated a 70% increase in health care expenditure for European Union Member States over 2007-2015 due to the spread of diabetes. In Lithuania, more than 10% of all money earmarked for health care is spent on treating diabetes. It is expected that this expenditure will increase unless serious action is taken to address the diabetes problem; as the rapporteur mentioned the number of people with diabetes in Europe is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030.

Derek Vaughan (S&D), *in writing.* – Diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens,

representing nearly 10% of the total EU population. I voted in favour of this resolution as I believe a dedicated EU strategy to tackle its growing diabetes problem is essential in order to improve research cooperation and focus on prevention and early diagnosis. The Member States should ensure adequate education on healthy eating and physical exercise in schools. I believe, along with my fellow MEPs, that early diagnosis should be made a priority in Member States' national programmes.

Angelika Werthmann (NI), *in writing*. – The report states that diabetes is one of the most common non-communicable diseases, estimated to affect more than 32 million EU citizens, or nearly 10% of the total EU population. Moreover, the number of people living with diabetes in Europe is expected to increase by 16.6% by 2030, as a result of the obesity epidemic, the ageing of the European population and other factors yet to be determined.

Artur Zasada (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) Diabetes is a chronic disease which is extremely insidious. It is estimated that half of those who suffer from diabetes do not, in fact, realise this, and every year, as many as 3 000 000 people around the world die because of it. Undiagnosed and untreated diabetes is the biggest cause of blindness, renal failure, heart attacks, strokes and amputations. So it must not be ignored or thought of as a condition which affects only a small percentage of people.

I fully agree with the rapporteur that it is essential to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy in the European Union for the prevention, early detection and alleviation of the effects of diabetes. It is essential to educate the public, because at the moment, health education in fact concentrates on providing information about communicable diseases. Of course, what is most important is prevention and making it possible for people to have free prophylactic and diagnostic tests, such as blood sugar level, blood pressure, adipose tissue and body weight tests. It will also be essential to provide advice on diabetes on a wide scale. The Member States should implement comprehensive programmes which aim to raise the awareness of the EU's citizens about the causes of the very high incidence of diabetes, which include improper diet, eating foods which have low nutritional value but are full of 'empty calories', lack of exercise, sitting for too long at work, overfeeding children and so on. These phenomena prove to have catastrophic results, and the costs of treating diabetes are very high.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Diabetes is estimated to affect more than 32 million people in the European Union, and this is expected to increase by about 16.6% by 2030 as a result of the obesity epidemic and the ageing of the European population. We are obviously in agreement with measures relating to prevention at different levels, the improvement and promotion of research and the collection of data about diabetes. We think that in order to combat diabetes it is fundamental to advocate that public health services, accessible to all of the population regardless of their financial situation, are maintained and strengthened, particularly at the primary care level, which has effective results in terms of prevention. This resolution does not address this fundamental concern.

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Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am voting for this report and would stress the high degree of alignment between the country and the EU's common positions in the area of foreign policy. This behaviour is important because it encourages the country to establish good relations with its neighbours. The demarcation of its border with Kosovo

in 2009 immediately enabled closer relations between the two parties and led to an agreement establishing common border policies in September 2011.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) As a member of the European Parliament's delegation for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, I support that country's eventual accession to the European Union and I believe that it is important to set a date for the start of negotiations. The country has demonstrated that it has continuously fulfilled the political criteria and hopes to continue along that path. The report calls on the country to continue with its reforms in order to 'ensure an effective and independent judiciary' and a 'professional, competent and impartial administration'. The fight against corruption as well as pluralism and media freedoms are other points on which we will not compromise. I therefore voted in favour of a report that recognises the progress made in the areas of administration, the judiciary, the electoral process, regional cooperation and the treatment of minorities. However, we have also pointed out that there has not yet been adequate integration of the Roma. The final issue is that of the name, which must be resolved via a solution that is acceptable to all. As my colleague, Mr Howitt, underlined, this is 'friendly but robust criticism', and we must continue down the same path and strengthen our dialogue with the country.

Zoltán Bagó (PPE), *in writing.* – (HU) I support the EU integration of the Western Balkan countries, and I expect MEPs from the other Member States to do the same, since the leaders of their countries had committed themselves in the Council to the accession of these states already in 2003. The enlargement policy advances the process of social change. In other words, it contributes to a country's stability. Leaving the countries wishing to join to their own devices poses a security policy risk in the region. We should not forget in the case of the Republic of Macedonia either, that the commitment made should have results, otherwise the credibility of the Union will suffer badly. The country satisfies the political conditions, as the Commission has acknowledged. Bilateral questions have no place in the accession process. The European Union needs to strive to reduce existing tensions with the large ethnic minority of Albanian origin in the case of the Republic of Macedonia. It remains the case that a greater proportion of the Macedonian public supports accession than opposes it, and it is not too late to begin negotiations.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution. As far back as 2003, at the Thessaloniki European Council, a commitment was made to admit all the countries of the Western Balkans to the EU in the long term. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was one of the first countries in the Western Balkans region to be awarded candidate country status. Many important reforms have been implemented in the country and it is also the country with the highest domestic public support for EU accession. The country has repeatedly emphasised the importance of integration with the EU and NATO, but the continuing dispute with Greece over the naming of the country and the Greek veto of the invitation for the country to join NATO in 2008 are preventing it from effectively achieving European and transatlantic integration. For three successive years in its annual progress report, the Commission has recommended setting a date for the start of EU accession negotiations, but this request has been ignored. I agree that given the significant political and structural reforms that this country has already implemented, the Council must take the Commission's recommendation into account and immediately set a date for the start of negotiations. I believe that the 2011 decision of the International Court of Justice should help to resolve the current dispute between this country and Greece,

and both countries should step up their efforts to find a compromise and overcome barriers preventing transatlantic development.

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) I voted with absolute conviction against this report on the accession process for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). We are staunchly opposed to this country's accession to the EU, firstly because of the huge democratic deficit affecting its society and government, as acknowledged in the resolution itself. The main reason, though, is because accepting FYROM into the Union would also represent a legitimisation of the unacceptable historical lies told by the country's government over the last 20 years, to the detriment of the cultural heritage that forms the basis for the historical identity of Europe and the West. I absolutely oppose the statements lauding the country's efforts to integrate the Roma community. As a result, I voted against.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution because the assessment made by the Commission in its 2011 progress report notes that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to fulfil the political criteria. The European Parliament regrets that the Council did not follow the Commission's recommendation for the third consecutive year and did not decide to open the accession negotiations with the country at its meeting on 9 December 2011. The European Parliament also commends the country for its good economic performance and for maintaining macro-economic stability and is delighted that the World Bank 'Doing Business' report declared it the third most successful country in the world over the past five years in undertaking regulatory reforms. However, more efforts should be made to avoid abuse of libel actions against journalists for political reasons. Media freedom is the cornerstone of democracy and an imperative for any country aspiring to become an EU Member State. The media sector should elaborate and implement high professional standards for journalists and adhere to the rules of ethics in journalism. Furthermore, the European Parliament calls on all stakeholders to promote and contribute to the development of an independent, pluralist, multi-ethnic, multicultural and non-partisan civil society within the country.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing.* – (CS) I am deeply concerned about recent developments in the Macedonian media, and about the fact that media ownership remains opaque and highly concentrated. The EU must therefore urge the country to show a greater commitment to media freedoms and pluralism, including an informed and pluralistic debate about the reform issues identified in the progress report. The authorities must ensure respect for the rule of law and media freedom in the country, and thereby ensure that the Commission's assessment remains positive in the future. In this context, I firmly believe that there should be an equitable and transparent distribution of government advertising revenues between all national broadcasters, regardless of their editorial content or political inclination. I agree with the Commission's recommendation to adopt measures ensuring that the state television channel fulfils the objectives and plays the impartial role of a public service broadcaster, and that the authorities adopt the necessary changes so as to align the Law on Broadcasting with EU legislation. I am concerned that the charge of defamation has been misused against journalists for political reasons. Media freedom is a cornerstone of democracy and must be an essential precondition for every country that is working towards EU membership.

Alain Cadec (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) I supported Mr Howitt's motion for a resolution because I agree with the approach it takes. I am in favour of the implementation of the Commission's reform proposals. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has made significant progress, but considerable efforts are still needed to combat corruption, ensure the independence of the judiciary and reform the public administration. Although

inter-ethnic violence ended after the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the country's political balance remains fragile. It is therefore essential, in my view, to remain cautious with regard to the progress of the negotiations. I agree with the Commission, which, in its report, calls for a return to political dialogue in order to ensure that the reforms are implemented within a reasonable timeframe. As regards the dispute over the name, I believe that the UN could certainly act as intermediary in this matter.

Antonio Cancian (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the 2011 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since it shines a positive light on some crucial steps taken by the country in relation to the EU accession process. The motion adopted by Parliament reprises the positive spirit of the Commission's 2011 progress report on the country's good results in terms of the political criteria, the Community *acquis* and the development of the market economy. It does, however, highlight some enduringly weak areas, foremost among which are the full achievement of rule of law, which reflects on the general inefficiency of the public administration, and the failure to fully establish the domestic market.

In particular, I voted against the proposal to drop Article 15 of this report because I think that the identity of the Macedonian people cannot, and must not, be besmirched or denied. I also remain convinced of the need for Parliament to facilitate regional dialogue and to promote the country's integration process in line with the efforts now being made and the rights of all interested parties.

Nikos Chrysogelos (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (EL) Having weighed up the pros and cons of this motion, I abstained. I want a resolution that lays down a much clearer framework for a mutually acceptable solution to the problems. The motion for a resolution has numerous positive points, but it also has seriously problematic points which, ultimately, prevented me from voting in favour of it, as I would have wished. Generally speaking, it is less balanced than the reports for the previous two years, which the Greek Greens voted in favour of. The solution to the name must indeed include solutions in terms of acceptance of the ethnic and linguistic self-determination of FYROM, with one eye on the future and on terms that do not undermine the right of other ethnic groups in the historic/geographical area of Macedonia as a whole from calling themselves Macedonians, should they so wish. At this point, the statements made in paragraph 15 of the motion are seriously problematic and will not help to provide motivation and time for truly convincing solutions. The motion should be an opportunity to resolve the problem through dialogue and a mutually acceptable compromise, by making use of the procedure for FYROM to accede to the European structures and laying down a timetable for it. The reference here to the recent precedent of the solution to differences between Croatia and Slovenia is positive as a condition for completion of Croatia's accession to the EU.

Tamás Deutsch (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) I welcome the fact that Macedonia was the first among the countries concerned to be granted candidate status. The Balkan region has key significance to the European Union, and is particularly important to Hungary as well. We must therefore leave no country behind. Over the past few years, Macedonia undertook several efforts and laboured relentlessly towards becoming a Member State of the European Union. In terms of establishing a market economy, it is approaching EU norms. The changes implemented in the fields of justice and administration, the reduction of decentralisation and the efforts made in the area of human rights all prove that the country is committed to Europe. It is, of course, important to note that there still remain ethnic issues, such as the matter of the Bulgarian minority, and there is also still headway to be made in terms

of reducing corruption and increasing the transparency of public expenditures; overall, however, the country is on the right track and I hope that it will cooperate with the European Union in taking all necessary measures. At the same time I find it sad that a debate over a country's name can stand in the way of its future development. We need a much more open-minded approach than that.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for this report as it advocates that the Council should attempt to set a date to begin accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, taking into account the Commission's most recent recommendations.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) In spite of the many challenges that still lie ahead, the progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia regarding its integration with the European Union is undeniable, a state of affairs I do not wish to overlook. At a time when we are seeking new collective responses to problems affecting us as a political and economic community, it is comforting to see that the European project remains appealing to our neighbours and that they are not giving up on adapting their institutions to that project. I am aware of the problems that the country's name poses for our Greek partners and the obstacle that this represents for future membership. I hope there will be enough good sense and understanding of international law so that, when the time comes and all membership criteria are fulfilled, this will not be an insurmountable obstacle.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The EU, which began as six countries, is continuing its enlargement process, mainly to the east, with the accession of Croatia envisaged in June 2013. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has been a candidate country since 2005 and is an important country in the region, fundamental to the Bosnia and Herzegovina peace process. The EU has been monitoring the reforms carried out by the government as regards implementation of democracy and respect for minorities. The first steps have been taken towards solving the corruption problem, there is a new approach to relations with Montenegro, there is greater transparency in the electoral process and a market economy is beginning to develop. I welcome the progress made and hope that the problem of naming will be promptly resolved within the framework of the United Nations. I voted for this report, as I believe that this country has created the correct conditions for the integration process to move forward, which is important for good neighbourly relations and for the peace process in the Balkans. The future of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is in Europe and I hope this can be realised within the shortest possible timeframe.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) As in other republics of the former Yugoslavia, the situation in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is unstable and has a destabilising influence on the surrounding region. Firstly, the problem of the name of the country remains, which has brought it into conflict with Greece in a process replete with nationalist rhetoric that is driving the two peoples apart, rather than bringing them closer together.

The position of the majority of this Parliament, in wanting to bring forward the date for starting negotiations, disrespects the sovereignty of both countries and only contributes to exacerbating the existing divisions. The majority in Parliament justifies this position by pointing to the advantages of FYROM joining NATO, a process that is inseparable from the militarisation of the EU and the enlargement of its zones of influence in the strategic region of the Balkans. EU accession is a process of sovereign decisions for every people, as

is the path to follow for economic and social development. Every people has the right to make a free decision about EU accession, without interference and following an open, informed and far-reaching debate based on reality and not on fantasies that never materialise.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing.* – (SK) The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues to fulfil the political criteria to a satisfactory degree. The country continues to implement accession-related reforms, though core challenges remain. In the early parliamentary elections, a new Parliament was elected and a coalition government was quickly formed. It is important to deepen political dialogue and to address the issue of parliament as a key democratic institution for the discussion and resolution of problems arising from differing political views.

Regarding economic development, the country is achieving some good economic results, and is striving to maintain macro-economic stability. The potential for investment, trade and economic development remains a vital reason to continue the process of the country's accession to the EU.

Also pleasing is its cooperation with the EU in the fight against organised crime and terrorism, and the conclusion of an operational agreement between the country and Europol aiming to substantially facilitate the exchange of analytical data and improve the fight against organised crime and terrorism. A positive fact is the new criminal procedure code, which should improve investigation procedures in complicated cases of organised crime and corruption.

On the other hand, I find it regrettable that the dispute over the name of the country continues to block its path to the EU and thus hinders the enlargement process itself.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), *in writing.* – (FR) I have not been very positive about the resolutions on the enlargement of the European Union to include the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. How can we gladly welcome new countries into the costly and ineffective gasworks that is the European Union? From the outside, they often see only an appearance of prosperity in which they want to participate. From the inside, we have to put up with its bureaucratic and pointlessly restrictive aspects. We continue to negotiate Iceland's accession, demanded by opportunism at the height of the Icelandic banking crisis, even though the vast majority of people are opposed to it, as next year's referendum will undoubtedly show. We want the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia to join the European Union quickly and prematurely, without having resolved any of the conflicts that those countries may have with their neighbours, including EU Member States, and without talking about their lack of preparation from an economic, legal and administrative perspective and the confrontational relations between their ethnic and religious communities, which we are going to import. In short, this headlong rush, in the midst of a crisis, while the EU's absorption capacity is far from proven, is worse than an error: it is faulty.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) Macedonia was the first country in the Western Balkans to be granted the status of candidate country for EU membership. Furthermore, the integration process has more support there from society than in any other country in the region. The outcome of the recent parliamentary elections and the rapid formation of a government are important factors encouraging the EU to begin talks with Macedonia about membership.

A serious obstacle to the commencement of negotiations is the continued dispute with neighbouring Greece over the name of the country. We are convinced that this dispute should be brought to an end and that on the one hand, Macedonia should be given a chance to begin negotiations, but, on the other hand, we need to help it not to support its own ethnic and cultural identity at the cost of its neighbours. The healthy development of the economy and the legal basis of its operation are to be welcomed. As with every country which is going through a period of change and laying the foundations of its own statehood, Macedonia is experiencing difficulties with unemployment, social exclusion and corruption. I am convinced that opening negotiations on EU membership will allow the acceleration of beneficial changes which will meet with the approval of Macedonian society. Therefore, I support adoption of the report and the resolution on this matter.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I abstained from voting on the European Parliament resolution on the 2011 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, even though the country was one of the first in the Western Balkans region to be granted candidate status, and even though many important reforms have been implemented in the country and it is also the country with the highest domestic public support for EU accession. The country has repeatedly emphasised the importance of integration with the EU and NATO, but the continuing dispute with Greece over the naming of the country and the Greek veto of the invitation for the country to join NATO are preventing it from effectively achieving European and transatlantic integration. I believe that both sides in the conflict must immediately begin to resolve current, protracted conflicts and step up their efforts to find a compromise and overcome barriers preventing this development.

Livia Járóka (PPE), *in writing*. – Although the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took over the Presidency of the Decade for Roma Inclusion in the second half of last year, and some minimal progress has been reported in enhancing the school performance of Roma children, the inclusion process of the country's most vulnerable minority group remained unacceptably slow. There is an astonishing twenty-fold over-representation of Roma children in special schools, the lack of personal documents and the extremely high unemployment still remains an unresolved problem and the percentage of children living under the poverty line even increased, reaching a shocking level of 37%. Discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin is still wide-spread, especially affecting Roma women and reports of police brutality, and the use of excessive force against Roma are a concern. It is necessary to promote dialogue between local authorities, judicial bodies, police and the Roma communities in order to abolish discrimination, to improve confidence and to combat ethnic profiling. The general lack of coordination and evaluation mechanisms can only be remedied by joining the European Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies and elaborating a national long-term strategy for Roma inclusion, including the necessary cross-sector, complex and territorially targeted development projects.

Tunne Kelam (PPE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the enlargement report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I welcome the decision of the Court of Justice of 5 December 2011, which could give a new impetus to solving the name dispute. In the case of each accession, the EU should be clear on its open-minded approach and use of pro-European language. It is high time now to look to the future and leave the past aside. The dispute between neighbours on the name issue has alarmingly delayed the start of the accession negotiations and harmed the image and credibility of the EU in the eyes of that country's citizens. I am aware that the present name of FYROM is insulting to the citizens

of that country. In the absence of another agreed term, the transition formula 'Future EU Member State of Macedonia' could be used. I welcome the withdrawal of the controversial law allowing the persecution of journalists on political grounds. This is an indication that FYROM is showing good will in working together with the EU. FYROM is progressing significantly with its reforms and I am sure that this course will continue. I call on the Council to take the positive recommendation from the EC seriously and set aside bilateral disputes that hinder progress.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The Western Balkans region is an area of great interest to the European Union and, in keeping with the commitment made to the states in this region, they will be able, sooner or later, to become Member States of the European Union. Although the Council did not decide at the meeting of 9 December 2011 to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the progress made recently by this country is encouraging.

The enlargement process in this region must be based on intensive regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. This is precisely why it is of paramount importance for a compromise to be reached on contested issues in this region. I think that the accession process will help bring greater regional stability and improve the economic performance of the Balkans region.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this resolution because I believe that Macedonia must go forward on its way to the European Union and therefore it is essential to send a positive signal regarding its future with us. On 5 December 2011, the International Court of Justice decided that Greece, by objecting to the admission of Macedonia to NATO, had breached its obligation under the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995. I welcome this decision. Now, the Council should reflect the Court's decision and immediately follow the recommendation of the European Commission by giving Macedonia a start date for its accession negotiations. The name issue between Macedonia and Greece is exclusively a bilateral issue and, as such, it should not interfere with the opening of accession negotiations. Progress has been made in the judiciary and the fight against corruption. I encourage the authorities to continue improving the independence, efficiency and resources of the judiciary and would stress that the unification of jurisprudence and publishing all court decisions are vital for the predictability of the judiciary and public trust in the system. High-level corruption cases must be a priority, along with transparency of public expenditure and the funding of political parties.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this report, which notes the decision of the International Court of Justice with respect to the name dispute issued on 5 December 2011; takes the view that this decision should give a new impetus to ensure that every possible effort is made to solve the name dispute under the auspices of the UN, and calls on the parties to comply with the judgment in good faith and use it to intensify dialogue, stressing at the same time the need for a mutually accepted compromise; welcomes in this regard the statement by the UN-appointed mediator and his call on the parties to view this event as an opportunity to think constructively about their mutual relationship and to consider a renewed initiative with a view to reaching a definitive solution to this issue and strongly regrets that the name dispute is continuing to block the country's road to EU accession and thus hindering the enlargement process itself; underlines that good neighbourly relations are a key criterion for the EU enlargement process and calls on the governments concerned to avoid controversial gestures, controversial actions and statements which could have negative effects on relations.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) In its enlargement strategy for 2011-2012, the Commission confirmed that ‘enlargement policy has proven to be a powerful tool for societal transformation’ and that ‘commitment, conditionality and credibility have been situated at the core of the accession process and its success’. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) was among the first countries of the region to be awarded candidate status, is the country with the highest domestic public support for EU accession, and has now been the subject of a positive recommendation from the Commission to set a date for the start of EU accession negotiations for three successive years. I therefore believe that starting a negotiation process for FYROM is beneficial for the parties involved.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing.* – The S&D Group hopes that the announced high-level accession dialogue will help enhance reforms in five priority areas: freedom of expression, rule of law, public administration reform, the election process and the fight against corruption. What is more, I would like to discuss the name of the country because I agree with the Greek delegation.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing.* – (DE) Like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia should clearly also be brought closer to the EU. We see the future of this country within the Union if it continues with the efforts it has made to date and if the tasks and objectives set for the Republic are met to the satisfaction of all concerned. The rapporteur should be complimented on the content of the resolution. He has recognised and included essential points, and I share his opinion that the name and linguistic dispute with Greece needs to be resolved. Although I am critical of a few specific issues, I have voted in favour of the resolution.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE), *in writing.* – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution. This is the third time the Commission has recommended that the Council should begin accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. I hope that this time, the Council will manage to take an appropriate decision. The country has been making consistent progress for years and it is important for the EU to recognise the work it has already done and to encourage euro optimism that consolidates public opinion and, above all, to give a new drive to reforms. The rate of the integration process is down to meeting the Copenhagen criteria and real progress transposing and implementing the *acquis*. Bilateral issues must not become the main or the only brake on progress. It is therefore important for Greece and Macedonia to begin a genuine dialogue on the name in the near future. A bilateral committee of historians may help politicians find some common ground. In a more general context, I want to point out that it is important for all countries in the region to enter into dialogues on historical issues. An open and non-politicised look at the most painful history is important for the well-being of societies and friendly coexistence with neighbours.

Katarína Neveďalová (S&D), *in writing.* – (SK) I welcome the positive developments in Macedonia. Despite some problem areas, the country is making successful progress and is gradually fulfilling the political and economic criteria for accession to the European Union. Among the greatest challenges facing Macedonia are improving freedom of expression and the media, and the fight against corruption. Efficiency in public administration is still quite low, and gaps in law enforcement hamper the proper functioning of the market economy. The dispute between Greece and Macedonia over the country’s name is also causing considerable problems, and I therefore urge both sides to try to find a resolution as soon as possible. I expect that the visit of Commissioner Füle will help to improve progress in priority areas and move matters forward.

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Since Macedonia has exhibited a good economic performance, we can reasonably assume that it is able to maintain its macro-economic stability. It is also the third most successful country in the world over the past five years in undertaking regulatory reforms. As a result of the global economic recovery, foreign direct investment is likely to increase over the next few years and the potential for investment, trade and economic development remains a decisive argument for pursuing the country's accession to the EU. I am of the opinion that the genuine progress made by the government and the implementation of EU reforms can help to create a political environment which will promote the resolution of bilateral issues. I disapprove of the lack of equality for women and the many discriminatory customs and stereotypes in the country. I also share the Commission's view, however, that corruption remains a serious concern. On the other hand, I am hopeful that the pre-accession process and the ongoing efforts to combat corruption will help to reduce corruption levels. For these reasons, I have voted in favour of this report.

Siiri Oviir (ALDE), *in writing*. – (ET) I voted in favour of this resolution, in recognition of the advances made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in becoming integrated with the European Union. Success has been achieved in different areas, for instance, reform of the judicial system, the training of judges and public prosecutors has been improved, the country's indicators of economic activity are stable, the struggle against corruption and awareness thereof have improved, the integration of different minorities into society is bringing results, etc. Citizens' subsistence is a concern, because a great number of people live in poverty and there is great social inequality, but the problem is being dealt with, and a strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion has been adopted. I also consider the weak supervision of law enforcement authorities to be a problem, in view of the use of violence by the police on the night of the elections. It is, however, true that police cooperation with the European Union in combating terrorism has been effective. I consider the prolonged failure to resolve the question of the name of Macedonia, as a result of which the country must bear the name of its former occupier, to be regrettable. As an Estonian, I would find it very humiliating if my homeland had to bear the title of 'Former Republic of the Soviet Union', for instance, in the interest of its neighbour's 'historical truth' There is also a Province of Luxembourg in the Kingdom of Belgium, on the border with the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, but the two countries nevertheless get along very well.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I believe that Macedonia's opportunities to become a full member of the EU depend very much on when the name dispute is resolved, because this is stopping the process of the country's accession to the EU and is also creating a barrier to the development process itself. Bilateral issues should therefore be addressed constructively as soon as possible, taking into account the EU's common interests and values. They cannot be an obstacle to the accession process or a conscious means of halting this process. It should be noted that commitment, conditionality and credibility are at the core of the accession process and its success. Macedonia should therefore increase its efforts to properly implement media freedom and pluralism in the country and combat corruption more effectively, as well as the high level of unemployment and poverty. Furthermore, an environment should be created that encourages businesses to invest more, small and medium-sized enterprises should be supported more effectively, and the good practice of consulting business community representatives should be continued.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this progress report because this country that has been devastated by wars and unrest needs the European

Union's democratic values. In just five years, Macedonia has made significant progress in the integration process: it has implemented judicial, decentralisation and public administration reforms, which have also been welcomed by the World Bank. The country has also been invited to join NATO once the issue regarding the naming of the country has been resolved. I agree with the calls for the state to address constructively the issue of the country's name and ensure that this does not halt the process of the country's integration, domestic reforms and the development of good neighbourly relations, and that the EU therefore does not close its doors. I also share the concern expressed over the human rights situation, press pluralism and corruption, and agree that cooperation and restructuring must continue.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) I voted for the resolution of the European Parliament on the 2011 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which welcomes the progress made by that country towards closer relations with the EU.

Alojz Peterle (PPE), *in writing.* – (SL) I welcome the progress made by Macedonia on reforms and the clear desire of the rapporteur and Commission that, after an unreasonably long wait, Macedonia begins accession negotiations. I voted in favour of this motion for a resolution on the 2011 progress report on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia because it reflects the correct and necessary political will. However, I voted against amendments which gave priority to the past over a commitment to the shared European future that Macedonia deserves.

Fiorello Provera (EFD), *in writing.* – (IT) I am against the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia joining the European Union in the immediate future. I agree with the rapporteur's view that there has been some progress – in fact, important progress; you just have to look at the latest elections, the economic reforms and at the end of the Parliamentary boycott. However, I am puzzled at the idea of accession, because there is still too great a distance between the social and political institutions of this Balkan state and those of the EU Member States. The rushed accession of a country in which there is separation and mistrust between ethnic groups could create a breeding ground for tensions within the EU and slow down the process by which the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia moves towards becoming a pluralist society.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Over recent years, Macedonia has made huge efforts to modernise in a wide variety of sectors. Its reasonable economic performance, the fight against corruption, better protection of fundamental rights, and the adoption of reforms to improve the efficiency of its judicial system have been indicative of this economic and social development. The EU's acknowledgement of this Balkan country in relation to Union enlargement policies is something to be welcomed.

Nikolaos Salavrakos (EFD), *in writing.* – (EL) I voted against Mr Howitt's report because I consider that the rapporteur has endeavoured, via the side door, to go beyond the instruction given to him to draft a motion for a resolution on FYROM and has tried, in paragraph 15, to take a stand and to formulate a name, which goes beyond his remit.

Debora Serracchiani (S&D), *in writing.* – (IT) Today's vote on the progress made by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia takes into account the difficult challenges that the country has faced. Even if much remains to be done, I am pleased with the progress achieved in the social sphere and in the fight against corruption, when you consider that

the country has moved up 40 places in the Transparency International anti-corruption index over the last five years.

However, the recent serious episodes of violence are a matter for concern, and are the worst since 2001 when the country was on the brink of civil war between the Albanian Muslim minority and the Macedonian Orthodox Christian majority. In accordance with the 2011 progress report, I deplore the risk that the forms of power sharing could institutionalise the ethnic minorities and transform the country into a two-nation state, putting democratic principles at risk. I hope that the freedoms and fundamental rights established under the rule of law will be respected.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) The Commission's 2011 progress report on enlarging the EU to take in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has confirmed, for the third year in a row, its good marks in terms of the political criteria, the Community *acquis* and the development of the market economy. It does, however, note some weaknesses relating to the rule of law, which reflect on the general efficiency of the public administration and the domestic market. The current situation that has now been blocking the decision to open accession talks with FYROM for three years is, at this point, a cause for deep concern. It looks to me that the time has come to get over this stalemate, partly to avoid feeding a general feeling of disillusionment in the country: drawing out this situation could, in my view, undermine the push for reform and weaken public consensus on their European future. In line with the other Member States, I think both Athens and Skopje should take effective action to find a compromise and move past the dispute over the country's name.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The commitment made by the EU in the Thessaloniki European Council Meeting in 2003 to all the Western Balkan States that they would join the European Union was reiterated in the 2011 progress report. The commitment to opening accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) was also reiterated. The dispute with Greece within the UN over the naming of FYROM should not create obstacles to the country's integration into the EU, since the country is committed to implementing the EU *acquis*, and to the second stage of the stabilisation and association agreement. What is more, FYROM has demonstrated good economic performance, while still showing some weaknesses, namely, in terms of judicial independence, the impartiality of the administration, the challenges of unemployment and high levels of poverty. I would also highlight the fact that the country has moved up 40 places in the Corruption Perceptions Index over the last five years, as well as the efforts made by the government in the areas of inter-ethnic conflict resolution, and the need for more policies targeting the entirety of the population, without ethnic discrimination. I am voting for this motion for a resolution, since the EU has a vital role to play in continued reforms in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for the report on enlargement to include the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations remain essential parts of the enlargement process. I welcome the progress made in modernising transport, energy and telecommunications networks. In view of the importance of the railway links as an alternative to road transport, I welcome the government's intention to upgrade or construct railway links from Skopje to the capitals of the neighbouring countries. I encourage continuing efforts to implement the Bologna Process in higher education and cooperation with other countries in this region in order to enhance the quality of its universities. I call on the government to make more efforts to

address structural unemployment and protect vulnerable groups, especially by means of sustainable economic growth and through the creation of a favourable business environment. With this in mind, I call on the government to support small and medium-sized enterprises by making it easier for them to access funding. I should say that I am concerned about the modest progress made on workers' and trade union rights. I call on the authorities to strengthen further the right to work and trade union rights and for more efforts to be made to align national legislation with the EU *acquis* in this area.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Like other republics of the former Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is unstable and has a destabilising influence on the entire region. Firstly, the problem of negotiations with Greece on the country's name remains; a process replete with nationalist rhetoric that is driving these peoples apart, rather than bringing them closer together. The position of the majority of this Parliament, in wanting to bring forward the date for starting negotiations, disrespects the sovereignty of the peoples of both countries and only contributes to exacerbating the existing divisions. The majority in Parliament justifies its position with interest in FYROM joining NATO, a process that is inseparable from the militarisation of the EU and the enlargement of its spheres of influence into the strategic region of the Balkans. EU accession is a process of sovereign choice for every people, as is the right to economic and social development. All peoples have the right to make a free choice about EU accession, without any outside interference and following an open, informed and far-reaching debate based on reality and not on myths that are never realised, as in the Portuguese case.

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Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I am voting for the proposal for Iceland's accession to become a full Member State of the European Union. However, it is important to stress that, in view of recent developments in the country, specifically the anti-government demonstrations, I hope that this expression of desire for the country to accede is the reflection of the will of the people.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Iceland is a country with a long democratic tradition that wishes to join the European Union. Iceland would even transpose Europe's laws significantly better than many Member States, according to the Commissioner responsible for enlargement. I therefore welcome the progress in the negotiations with a country that felt the full force of the economic crisis but reacted in an exemplary fashion and has now achieved 3% growth in 2012. We firmly believe that its accession will not be a burden on the European Union's budget. The problems that remain, such as whale hunting, and the opening of the chapters on agriculture and rural development, must be resolved through negotiation. I fully support Iceland's accession to the European Union, but it is also important to note that the political divisions within the government over its possible accession could still jeopardise this process.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcomed this resolution. Iceland has already been cooperating closely with the EU for some time as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation, and has transposed into its national law and applied a significant portion of the EU *acquis*. Iceland also contributes to European cohesion and solidarity through the Financial Mechanism under the EEA and is implementing sufficient economic and fiscal consolidation, which has helped improve the economic situation. The accession of Iceland, with its long historical experience, strong democratic traditions and high level of civic culture, will strengthen the

EU. In fact, Iceland was the first country to announce that it recognised the restoration of Lithuania's independence. I believe that Iceland's achievements in defending and safeguarding human rights and its high level of cooperation with international organisations for the protection of human rights will enable the EU to enhance its role as a worldwide defender of human rights.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution because Iceland contributes to European cohesion and solidarity through the Financial Mechanism under the European Economic Area (EEA) and cooperates with the EU in peacekeeping and crisis management operations. The European Parliament welcomes the prospect of having as a new EU Member State a country with a historically long and strong democratic tradition and civic culture. It also commends Iceland for its good record in safeguarding human rights and ensuring a high level of cooperation with international organisations for the protection of human rights. Iceland's accession to the European Union would significantly enhance the EU's prospects of playing a more active and constructive role in Northern Europe and in the Arctic, contributing to multilateral governance and sustainable policy solutions in the region, as challenges to the Arctic environment are of mutual concern. Iceland could become a strategic bridgehead in the region and its accession to the EU would further anchor the European presence in the Arctic Council. Iceland should enhance the preparations for alignment with the European Union *acquis*, in particular, in areas not covered by the EEA Agreement, and ensure its implementation and enforcement by the date of accession.

Antonio Cancian (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I was happy to vote for the motion for a resolution tabled by Mr Preda on the progress made by Iceland with a view to its forthcoming accession to the European Union because I share his essentially positive opinion. Iceland is a country with an ancient and well-established democratic tradition, which has been cooperating with the EU for some time and has already adopted part of the EU *acquis*, as it is a member of the Schengen agreements and the European Economic Area (EEA).

Therefore, I am convinced that the attention and respect shown for human rights thus far will definitely be confirmed also in the new constitution currently in the process of being drafted. After a period of crisis, fiscal and economic consolidation seems to be well under way and allows us to be hopeful that Iceland's manufacturing and financial system will recover quickly. I hope that the fisheries negotiations, currently one of the most critical issues, will also soon be resolved with an agreement able to accommodate the interests of all the parties involved. However the figures from recent surveys arouse a certain amount of concern, as they suggest that 67% of Iceland's citizens are against accession: the EU has to reverse this negative trend and regain credibility.

Anne Delvaux (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) In 2010, the European Council decided to open negotiations on Iceland's accession to the EU. The European Parliament has adopted a resolution on the 2011 report on those negotiations. Iceland already cooperates broadly with the EU because it is already a member of the European Economic Area and the Schengen area in particular. From an economic point of view, the situation in the country is improving slowly but surely. From a political point of view, it has a long tradition of democracy and cooperation with Northern Europe, and it is very active in Euro-Atlantic cooperation. The fact that the majority of Icelanders support the accession negotiations is a clear sign that the people of Iceland want to move closer to European standards in all

areas. It was also important to point out that the 'Icesave' dispute must be resolved outside the accession negotiations and must not be an obstacle to Iceland's accession process.

Tamás Deutsch (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) We are very pleased to note that Iceland has managed to steer the negotiations in the right direction, despite the fact that there are certain chapters where an agreement has yet to be reached. Iceland is an integral part of the accession process, but it is important to note that within the framework of the EU policy, it is our obligation to also take account of the country's specificities and expectations. One reason to settle the issue of fishing as soon as possible is that the population is treating Iceland's fisheries policy, which accounts for 5% of the country's economy and is radically different from that of the EU, as a matter of priority. Important to both parties, this subject could contribute considerably to the populace, which is otherwise averse to the EU, ultimately not rejecting accession.

We therefore need joint efforts to address future challenges, and it is important in particular in the field of fishing to reach an agreement that is beneficial to both sides. I am certain that the Danish Presidency and the European Commission will do everything in their power to promote these negotiations. Iceland has much to offer to the EU, and the EU, in turn, also has much to offer to Iceland. The country has always been an integral part of Europe. Iceland's accession negotiations are unlike others seen over the past few years, as this insular country is part of the Schengen Area and the European Economic Area, cooperates in several other respects with the EU, and also applies its legislation. Accordingly, Iceland's ambitions must be treated as a matter of extreme importance.

I welcome the launch of the negotiations between the Commission and Iceland, and wish them a successful start in the accession process.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this report because I am delighted at the prospect of having Iceland as a new EU Member State, a country with a democratic tradition and a civic culture that are long-standing and robust. The progress made by Iceland with the accession process should be stressed, as should the opening of 11 negotiation chapters and the provisional closure of eight of these chapters in the negotiation process.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Iceland seems to have been driven to join the European Union when it ran into a deep financial crisis. It is undeniable that Iceland is a European country, with a rich history and high standards of democracy, transparency, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. It meets the Copenhagen criteria, so its potential accession does not cause the same problems posed by other candidate Member States.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The EU, which started with six countries, continues its enlargement process, particularly eastwards, with Croatia slated to accede in June 2013. This report concerns the EU's enlargement to include Iceland, previously the territory of Denmark which, coincidentally, holds the EU Presidency. On 5 December 2011, the European Parliament recommended that negotiations on Iceland's accession process go ahead. This is a country that is already in the single market and the Schengen area, that has a highly professional government, that is undergoing a financial recovery process already marked by success, as its reclassification by the ratings agencies shows, and that has a team that is very committed to the integration process. There remain some issues to be resolved, particularly as regards fisheries, but in other areas, such as the transposition of EU directives, it is showing itself to be more efficient than many Member States. I voted in favour because it is crucial that Parliament shows its determination to include Iceland,

because it represents no financial burden for the EU, and I hope that the Icelandic people will understand the benefits of adopting the euro rather than the Canadian dollar or the yen.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Iceland, a founding member of NATO, is a country with a very important geostrategic position, due in large measure to its proximity to the Arctic, an area in which there is a dispute under way about sovereignty over the region's unexploited natural resources, particularly oil and gas.

As normally happens in cases like this, the majority in this Parliament are seeking to push Iceland's political parties and government to accept neoliberal policies and choices. It was this very package of neoliberal measures that led to the major crisis that Iceland is facing and, as in the EU, is having very serious social consequences. The report demands that the Icelandic authorities implement economic reforms, lift capital controls, and open up the energy, air transport and fishing industries, whilst rejecting any measures to protect its economy and workers.

Once again, the concerns guiding the majority in this Parliament and the ideological principles that they espouse are clear. It is illuminating that they have taken the side of the major banks of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, expressing satisfaction at payments to 'creditors', whilst ignoring that they are responsible for the crisis and passing responsibility for paying to the Icelandic workers and people.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) Iceland meets the Copenhagen criteria and, on 27 July 2010, accession negotiations were opened with the country following approval by the Council. It works closely with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) and under the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation, and has already adopted a significant part of the *acquis*. It contributes to European cohesion and solidarity through the financial mechanism within the EEA and cooperates with the EU in peacekeeping and crisis management operations. Iceland's progress in the accession process is pleasing, as is the opening of 11 negotiating chapters and provisional closure of eight of them during the course of the negotiations.

I am of the opinion that it is important to create the conditions for the completion of the accession process with Iceland and to ensure that its accession is successful. Another positive fact is that a large proportion of Icelanders support the continuation of accession negotiations. The government supports the organisation of balanced debates on the accession process that are based on ample information and the involvement of Icelandic society in public discussions of EU membership. The EU may gain a new Member State with a long, strong democratic tradition and civil culture.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) The Preda report on progress in Iceland's preparations for EU membership should be greatly welcomed. Iceland is a small country, but it is one which has a strong democratic tradition and great spirit. Iceland has also demonstrated the greatest determination in overcoming the financial crisis and, in 2012, will be one of the fastest developing states in the European Economic Area. The very good evaluation of the alignment of the Icelandic legal system with EU law and the closure of eight negotiation chapters out of the 11 which have been opened is a good sign of the progress of negotiations in 2012. Without doubt, the most important areas of the negotiations for Iceland are fisheries and agriculture, but countries which apply for membership always give these chapters special attention. The agreements reached on fisheries to date are a good sign that agreement can also be reached in these areas. I wish

Iceland success in this process because its accession to the EU means the territory covered by the Union will extend from Malta to Iceland.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution because eight chapters have been opened and provisionally closed so far in the accession negotiations while three others have been opened, and Iceland is already cooperating closely with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the Schengen agreements, and the Dublin II Regulation, and has therefore already adopted a significant part of the *acquis*. A considerable proportion of Icelanders are in favour of the continuation of the accession negotiations and Icelandic society is actively involved in public discussions about EU membership. Iceland's accession to the EU would significantly enhance the Union's prospects of playing a more active and constructive role in Northern Europe and in the Arctic, contributing to multilateral governance and sustainable policy solutions in the region, as challenges to the Arctic environment are of mutual concern. Iceland could become a strategic bridgehead in the region and its accession to the EU would further anchor the European presence in the Arctic Council. I believe that it is essential to create the conditions to complete the accession process with Iceland and ensure that its accession is a success. I welcome the prospect of having as a new EU Member State a country with a historically long and strong democratic tradition and civic culture.

Tunne Kelam (PPE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the resolution on the 2011 progress report on Iceland. Iceland had already met almost all the criteria before the start of the accession procedure and has been a close partner of the EU in the framework of EFTA. It is a founding member of NATO and demonstrated its principles and solidarity by being the first to reinstate diplomatic relations with the Baltic States in 1991. This proves that Iceland is a reliable and strong partner for the EU in the international arena. It is among the world's leading users of renewable energies and in terms of investment in innovation and research in alternative energy sources. The EU can only benefit from its membership. Iceland must also want accession. The country has to respect the ban on whale hunting and trading in whale products set out in the *acquis* and has to compromise on the fisheries chapter, despite fisheries having a special position in Iceland's identity and economy. The news of Iceland's plans to adopt the Canadian dollar and drop the króna is a source of concern and raises questions about its motivation to join the EU.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted for this report, which notes with satisfaction the establishment of the Constitutional Council and the ongoing process of the review of the Icelandic constitution aimed at increasing democratic safeguards, strengthening checks and balances, improving the functioning of the state institutions and better defining their respective roles and powers. It also welcomes the efforts to strengthen the role and efficiency of the Icelandic Parliament (Althingi) by reinforcing its oversight role, as well as the transparency of the legislative process.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Iceland, which already meets the Copenhagen criteria, opened accession negotiations on 27 July 2010 following approval by the Council. The screening of the EU *acquis* has almost been completed. Eight chapters have been opened and provisionally closed so far in the accession negotiations: Chapter 2 – Freedom of Movement for Workers, Chapter 6 – Company Law, Chapter 7 – Intellectual Property Laws, Chapter 20 – Enterprise and Industrial Policy, Chapter 21 – Trans-European Networks, Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights, Chapter 25 – Science and Research, and Chapter 26 – Education and Culture. Three others have been opened: Chapter 5 – Public Procurement, Chapter 10 – Information Society and Media, and Chapter 33 – Financial

and Budgetary Provisions. Iceland is already cooperating closely with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation; it has, therefore, already adopted a significant part of the *acquis*. I therefore consider the Iceland accession process on track. It is a country with a historical tradition of democracy and civic culture that are long-standing and robust.

Louis Michel (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) Iceland fulfils the Copenhagen criteria and the accession negotiations have been open since July 2010. As a country with a tradition of democracy, it is already cooperating closely with the European Union. It is a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation. Furthermore, it has already adopted a significant part of the *acquis communautaire*. While its accession is still causing political division within the government, the parliament and all of the country's main political forces, a significant proportion of Icelanders are still in favour of continuing negotiations. I welcome Iceland's ambition to open all negotiation chapters during the Danish Presidency and I hope that the accession negotiations will proceed successfully. However, divergences remain between the EU and Iceland on issues related to whale hunting and fishing. I believe that Iceland's accession to the EU would significantly enhance the Union's prospects of playing a more active and constructive role in Northern Europe and in the Arctic.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing*. – I think that Icelandic accession to the EU should be supported if the government also secures the support of the Icelandic citizens.

Andreas Mølzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Iceland is a country that is very European in nature and, unlike Turkey, it is culturally and historically part of Europe. Therefore, nothing should stand in the way of swift accession negotiations with Reykjavik. However, there is no reason for the European Union to give Iceland special treatment. In particular, the EU must not pay Iceland's debts, nor must the debts of bankrupt Icelandic banks be passed on to individual EU Member States. It is also important that the Icelandic people are not forced into anything. They must be able to decide on their possible accession freely and without propaganda from Brussels. On the basis of these considerations, I abstained from the vote.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE), *in writing*. – (LT) I am particularly pleased to talk about Iceland because it was the very first country to recognise Lithuania's independence 21 years ago. I welcome this country's progress preparing for possible European Union membership; as a member of the European Economic Area, it is transposing a large part of the *acquis communautaire* with relative ease. I nevertheless agree with the comments on fisheries and the protection of marine resources – I believe that as the adoption of the new common fisheries policy draws nearer, it is particularly important for sustainable fishing practices which preserve stocks to be implemented in countries that are independent from the EU but which are closely linked to it.

Katarína Neveďalová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) Iceland is a country with a long-standing democracy, and therefore meets all the political criteria for EU membership. In addition to a long tradition of representative democracy, the country also has a judicial system at a very high level and anti-corruption measures and measures that bind ministers and many officials to the use of procedures that minimise conflicts of interest. Many of these policies and measures are at a higher level than those in some current Member States.

Despite a functioning market economy, Iceland has certain discords with the EU in the area of trade. Specifically, these concern the protection of fisheries in Iceland. Many observers argue that the country's EU membership is conditional precisely on fishing. The

problem is not whaling, which is banned in the EU, but the general nature of the country, which is based on this sector. It is because of the nature of the country that this expansion must be approached in a proper manner. I fully support the entry of Iceland and I firmly believe that Iceland will succeed in overcoming the obstacles relating to the common fisheries policy (CFP).

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcome this resolution. Iceland is one of the oldest democracies in Europe. Iceland and the EU cooperate closely in many areas and its accession to the EU would further enhance the Union's role in Northern Europe and the Arctic. It should be noted that in 2011, the country made significant progress towards EU membership. I am pleased that Iceland is implementing the Icelandic Modern Media Initiative, which will ensure the effective implementation of freedom of expression. It should be noted that the Icelandic authorities must focus in particular on the resolution of the Icesave issue, which cannot become an obstacle in the way of Iceland's accession process. I believe that the significant state intervention in the banking sector needs to be tackled as soon as possible. Certain branches of industry should also be reformed and opened to foreign entities.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this European Parliament resolution on the 2011 progress report on Iceland. I did so because I believe the close historical ties between Iceland and northern Europe and the successful Euro-Atlantic cooperation over the last 60 years on their own represent the enrichment of the European Union, as does the fact that Iceland's accession represents the inclusion of a state with a democratic tradition and a civic culture that are historically long-standing and robust. The report also says that a significant proportion of Icelandic people support continued accession negotiations.

Alojz Peterle (PPE), *in writing*. – (SL) Again, I voted for this motion for a resolution on the 2011 progress report on Iceland because I welcome this country's European ambitions and, despite current internal political polarisation over accession, I firmly believe that it is beneficial both to Iceland and the European Union.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) It is not surprising that Iceland wants to join the European Union, since it already cooperates closely with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation. It has, therefore, already adopted a significant part of the EU *acquis*. A country with an established democratic tradition and a historically strong civic culture will always be welcome to join the current Europe of the 27.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) There is no doubt that Iceland is closing in on joining the European Union, bearing in mind that it meets the Copenhagen criteria, that accession negotiations were opened on 27 July 2010, and that the screening of the EU *acquis* has almost been completed. Furthermore, Iceland is already cooperating closely with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation, and has therefore already adopted a significant part of the *acquis*. The Icelandic Government is supporting a well-informed and balanced debate about the accession process and the involvement of Icelandic society in the public discussions about EU membership. Indeed, the opening of the EU Information Centre in Iceland is an opportunity for the European Union to provide the citizens of Iceland with all possible information regarding all consequences of accession for the country.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) Negotiations for Iceland's accession started in 2010, following the declaration of bankruptcy in 2008, which led to the fall of its government and the implementation of a range of institutional and economic reforms, and to an IMF economic recovery programme being put in place. A country's entry to the EU is dependent on the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria. In this case, Iceland and the EU have already closed eight of the 11 negotiation chapters already open. However, Iceland is a particular case, as it already cooperates with the EU as a member of the European Economic Area, the Schengen agreements and the Dublin II Regulation, as well as cooperating on peacekeeping operations and crisis management. Furthermore, there have been economic improvements and a slight recovery of GDP. I should also like to mention the public support for the accession process, which is crucial to the inclusion of a society in the EU, following the complete implementation of the Copenhagen criteria, of political and economic criteria, and of the EU *acquis*.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted for the European Parliament resolution on the 2011 progress report on Iceland. I support Iceland's accession process because Iceland contributes to cohesion and European solidarity. I encourage the Icelandic authorities to continue their efforts to reduce the level of unemployment and, in particular, youth unemployment. I call on the government to boost small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by facilitating their presence in the international market and by providing adequate access to financial resources. Iceland, which generates energy mostly from renewable resources, can make a valuable contribution to EU policies in this area due to its experience in the field of renewable energies. Closer cooperation in this field may have a positive impact on investment and therefore on the economic and employment situation in both Iceland and the EU. I think that Iceland's accession to the EU would significantly enhance the EU's prospects of playing a more active and constructive role in Northern Europe and in the Arctic, contributing to multilateral governance and to finding sustainable policy solutions in the region.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), *in writing.* – I rather doubt that Iceland wants to join the EU, or indeed that it is in Iceland's best interests. But if that is what the people want, then we should support them. Iceland has had close ties with the UK for hundreds of years, is a NATO ally, has a deeply-entrenched democracy and occupies a geographical position of strategic importance. But it has been badly damaged in its self-inflicted banking crisis. There are also sticking points. One, inevitably, is the Icesave issue: it is important that the British and Dutch Exchequers, which bailed out British and Dutch depositors after the 2008 bankruptcy of Icesave Bank, are compensated. I understand that progress is being made on this issue outside the accession procedure. There is also a dispute over Icelandic mackerel quotas. The UK opposes the current increase in Iceland's mackerel quota as this is not sustainable and is damaging British interests. I therefore abstained on this report.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) This report is another demonstration of the inseparable nature of the expansions of the EU and NATO. The EU is extending its hand to Iceland, a founding member of NATO and a country with an important geostrategic position, due to its proximity to the Arctic and to the dispute about sovereignty over the region's unexploited natural resources, particularly oil and gas. The majority in Parliament are using this report to put pressure on Iceland's political parties and government to accept the neoliberal measures that have led to the serious crisis being faced by the country, which is having extremely serious social consequences. That is why they are demanding that the Icelandic authorities implement economic reforms, lift capital controls, and open up the

energy, air transport and fishing industries, whilst rejecting any measures to protect its economy and workers. The concerns guiding this majority are clear when they take the side of the major banks in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, expressing satisfaction at payments to 'creditors' whilst ignoring that they are responsible for the crisis and passing responsibility for paying to the Icelandic people. The people of this country have set a significant example in combativeness in fighting to defend their sovereignty and in rejecting these backward social steps.

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Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing.* – (PT) I am voting for this report. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina should consistently express its desire to join the European Union. State structure should reflect the existence of a single, undivided country because this can only benefit its citizens, who should also fully understand the benefits of joining Europe.

Alfredo Antoniozzi (PPE), *in writing.* – (IT) The recent instalment of the new government in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 10 February brought an end to the political stalemate that had been created in the country and had stunted its development. This provides an excellent foundation for reviving the European agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Among the most significant actions taken by the new government, I should like to point out the initiatives to bring in a census, the adoption of the laws on State aid and the adaptation of the country's constitution to the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

I support the motion tabled by Ms Pack: we must urge the Bosnian authorities to make further efforts and take further steps to meet the EU accession criteria. That said, I think it is essential that Bosnia and Herzegovina complies with the European Court of Human Rights ruling in the Sejdić-Finci case and with Article 2 of the stabilisation and association agreement (SAA), which give greater guarantees on human rights and democratic principles.

The decision to dissolve the local office of the High Representative is quite correct and I think it will promote a greater sense of responsibility among the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Pino Arlacchi (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted for this resolution because I support the prospect of EU membership for Bosnia. The European perspective is one of the most unifying factors amongst the people of the country. Nevertheless, to go further with the accession negotiations, there is the need to strengthen the rule of law in Bosnia. Corruption continues to seriously plague its socio-economic and political development. Trafficking in human beings, especially women and girls, is still a serious problem there. For these reasons, we ask the Bosnian Government to ensure the establishment of an independent, impartial and effective judicial system in line with EU and international standards. I value this text as a good starting point to encourage Bosnia to take further concrete steps to put the country firmly back on track towards the EU.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing.* – (FR) While the prospects of negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina seemed to be in jeopardy, the change in government and resumption of the reforms suggest that we are once again back on the right path. Firstly, as regards its relations with its neighbours, I welcome its efforts to resolve the existing problems with Serbia and Croatia. Bosnia's political leaders have therefore reached agreement on the formation of a new government and several key laws have entered into force, including

the Law on State Aid and the Census Law. Nevertheless, the report highlights the efforts that are still needed to achieve an independent judicial system, respect for human rights and minority rights, and the promotion of an independent and diverse media. As the Danish Minister for European Affairs said, we can talk about 'cautious optimism'. Some of my colleagues want to close the door on this country again but I believe that it is much more important to push forward our values of democracy and progress.

Zoltán Bagó (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the 2011 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. I am committed to the integration of a sovereign and united Bosnia and Herzegovina, and agree with the accession prospects elaborated in the document. We must pay particular attention to preventing the Western Balkan region from falling behind in the process of European integration. It is a major step forward that the Bosnian leadership has realised that it does not wish to lose its European perspective. I have high hopes for the future measures of the newly formed government. I must stress the necessity of reinforcing education and training in addition to the reform of the judiciary and the fight against corruption, trafficking in human beings and money laundering. I agree with transferring the tasks of the EU Police Mission to the assistance project financed by the IPA after the dissolution of the former. Croatia's accession will surely reinforce the country's commitment to integration, as it has close ties to its neighbour due to the presence of a Croatian minority on its territory.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcomed this resolution assessing the progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina towards European Union membership. The report indicates that for some time, the country has been failing to pursue much-needed reforms in key areas like state building, governance, enforcement of the rule of law, etc. This is due to the political parties' inability to agree on the formation of a new government, which has lasted fifteen months. Bosnia and Herzegovina still need to make significant efforts to implement the necessary reforms indicated in the report, such as ensuring an impartial, independent and effective judicial system, establishing a supreme court, combating corruption and trafficking in human beings more effectively, prosecuting perpetrators, etc., so that progress is accelerated at all levels and the country meets the commitments it has made.

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted against this resolution on Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress along the road map to EU accession. Enlarging the Union to the Balkan region is one of the riskiest EU foreign policy decisions, since the majority of states in this region – including Bosnia and Herzegovina – continue to be afflicted with high levels of corruption and clientelism in government, major inter-ethnic tensions and growing religious fundamentalism among its Muslim communities. Opening the Union's doors to countries that are still heavily affected by socio-political instability is an unacceptable decision and one that endangers the security of EU citizens.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution because the European Union continues to be strongly committed to supporting a sovereign and united Bosnia and Herzegovina. One of the EU's underlying policy objectives is to accelerate the country's progress towards EU membership and thus help improve the quality of life for the benefit of all citizens. The European Parliament welcomes the European Union's overall strategy towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the strengthening of the EU's presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the creation of a reinforced EU representative acting under a double-hatted mandate as European Union Special Representative and Head of Delegation. The authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina should

more effectively investigate and prosecute corruption cases and increase the number of convicted perpetrators. The ambitions of the authorities to launch an action plan to combat corruption in the civil service are welcome. The authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina should actively safeguard and promote the rights of all groups and individuals, who should be protected against direct or indirect discrimination and violence. The European Parliament calls on the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighbouring countries to do everything possible to resolve border disputes with their neighbours, either through bilateral agreements or through other means.

Alain Cadec (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I support this motion for a resolution, which calls for political dialogue and functional institutions in order to push forward the reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I note that the stabilisation and association agreement is still frozen. That is why I am in favour of strengthening Europe's commitment in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a view to overcoming the internal problems. The European Union must continue the process it launched in that region with Croatia and Montenegro and help with the implementation of the European *acquis*.

Antonio Cancian (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I would like to declare my support for this resolution, which we are voting on at an unprecedentedly fitting moment given the recent political developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact, after a deadlock lasting more than a year, a new government took office in February and we can therefore remain hopeful that the agreement reached will enable the country to start the reforms needed to bring it closer with the EU. Aside from consolidating relationships with the other countries in the Balkan region and fully taking over the responsibilities for integration hitherto managed by the EU Special Representative and Head of Delegation, the country must also embark on a process of socio-economic stabilisation and development that will ensure that it does not continue to lag behind on the road to accession.

As Mr Füle also pointed out, the road has so far been travelled too slowly and with a lack of coordination. I think the EU ought to help Bosnia and Herzegovina by supporting it in drawing up a precise agenda whose main objectives include combating the widespread corruption at all levels of society, excessive unemployment and the precarious state of the judicial system, all of which are key issues that have so far hamstrung investment and growth.

Emer Costello (S&D), *in writing*. – I very much look forward to the day when Bosnia and Herzegovina joins the EU. I believe its citizens would benefit enormously from membership. Equally importantly, there is much we could all learn from the full involvement of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the process of European integration. The EU must continue to encourage and to help Bosnia and Herzegovina in delivering on reforms. Progress is being made, such as the recent appointment of Mr Bevanda as Prime Minister and the State aid and census laws, but the reform process has to be deepened, especially in relation to the state budget for 2012 and ensuring the constitution complies with the ECHR, in line with the Sejdić-Finci ruling. Croatia will join the EU in 2013 and Serbia has now been granted candidate status. If Bosnia and Herzegovina wants to apply for candidate status this year, all of its political leaders need to deliver for its people. They have to reach a consensus on strengthening state-level institutions. Bosnia and Herzegovina can only enter the EU as a single country. The undermining of state institutions will only deprive all of its citizens of the benefits of membership.

Corina Crețu (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) Unfortunately, the report which the Commission has submitted to the European Parliament notes too little progress, both politically and in the other areas subject to scrutiny during the accession process. Political and legal reforms have stagnated. The constitution has not been harmonised with the provisions of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. There are problems between the country's parliament and the parliaments of the three entities. The reforms have made too little progress in terms of expanding the administrative capacity of the state and its various institutions. The report indicates that justice still continues to be a major problem. The same applies to freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

The EU is particularly interested in bringing stability to the Western Balkans region and has done everything dependent on it to meet its commitments. It seems that our partners do not have the political desire to make the decisions required to be able to achieve together the expected progress. I understand the problems of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fact that many of the wounds of the past have not closed or the healing is superficial. However, these changes are needed, primarily, progress in the area of politics and justice, precisely so that the past is never repeated. These are some of the reasons why I support the resolution.

Anne Delvaux (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I welcome the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on the 2011 report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. I welcome the political stabilisation of the country through the formation of a national government capable of implementing the numerous reforms needed to pursue the path of accession. There are many challenges, especially with regard to the economic situation in the country, which has a high level of youth unemployment, reducing the bureaucratic burden and combating corruption. In this regard, Parliament urges the new government to give priority to the reforms needed for Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the World Trade Organisation in order to encourage an even more positive business environment and attract more foreign investment. However, it is important to stress Bosnia and Herzegovina's good cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, to which it has responded promptly and adequately. The efforts to resolve the outstanding issues between Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Croatia, which have intensified in the last few months, are proof of Bosnia's proactive approach; an approach that should be encouraged.

Tamás Deutsch (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) As Hungary has announced on several occasions, it is committed to the EU integration of the Balkans. It is therefore welcome that, in February, 16 months after the elections, a new federal government was formed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The government is in no easy position. It must persuade three entities to engage in dialogue and cooperation with each other.

To this day, differences between ethnic and national minorities continue to divide the country. All forms of expressions of radicalism must be prevented, as we must not allow ourselves to be mired in ethnic disputes. We must not let such differences impede the country's development. To guarantee the rights of the Croatian and other minorities living in the central regions of the country is an essential requisite of accession. It is crucial for EU rights and rules to be transposed more effectively into national legislation and for an institutional system that promotes democracy, stability and EU integration to be set up. The adoption of the law on State aid and the census law, and the government's treating EU integration as a top priority, are welcome developments. However, a constitutional amendment in line with the European Convention on Human Rights is still necessary.

With the EU granting candidate status to Serbia and Croatia joining the EU in the next year, the European Union and Bosnia and Herzegovina will have shared borders. The country must therefore take all essential steps to give new hope and new impetus to its development and its integration into the European Union.

I am hopeful that the EU's policy regarding the Balkans, including the granting of candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, will bear fruit.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this resolution because I believe that, despite the scant progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina as a candidate country, progress towards EU integration is possible with the proper determination, with political responsibility, and with a culture of compromise.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) A country marked by a civil war that has left deep wounds amongst its population, and which is still today seeking to restore its social fabric and to re-establish a free and peaceful multi-ethnic society, is worthy of support and close scrutiny from all European countries. Even today, we are bound to remember what sadly happened there and how Europe failed to react to the prevailing violence. The recently overcome political deadlock makes it possible to nurture hopes for the future, but it also demonstrates the extent to which ethnic fault lines still exist, as well as the difficulties experienced in returning to democratic coexistence and normality. The European Union should monitor developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina closely and support the country's efforts at a reconstruction that is nearing slowly and painfully.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The creation of Europe as a single area with freedom of movement for persons and goods will only be realised when all European countries have acceded to the European Union, so realising the dream of the 'father of Europe': Robert Schuman. This report analyses EU enlargement towards Bosnia and Herzegovina. This integration process is key to the pacification of the Balkans region, but it is making very slow progress. The scars of armed conflict are still being felt because everyone lost family members. The coming to power of a new generation shows signs of some opening up, as demonstrated by the establishment of good neighbourly relations with Serbia, by the efforts to resolve border disputes, and by the cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the speed of response to its requests. However, serious issues remain unresolved, such as corruption, educational reform, bars on the entry of citizens of Kosovo to see family members in Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc. I voted for this report because it is crucial that Parliament demonstrate its openness to progress in the integration process, all the more so because politicians have already realised that they are missing the 'Europe train'.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This resolution supports maintaining Bosnia as a protectorate of the EU (or Germany) and so does not contribute, as it should, to healing the injuries of a civil war, for which the great powers of the EU and NATO have a clear responsibility. The majority in Parliament supports the 'reinforced' EU Special Representative and continuation of the EU military operation, EUFOR Althea, rather than calling for an end to their mandates. Instead of helping to heal the open wounds, the majority in Parliament is fuelling the same situation of permanent instability that has afflicted the whole region since the end of Yugoslavia. EU accession must arise from a sovereign decision of every people, people who are severely limited in their sovereignty – as is the case of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D), *in writing*. – (SK) The European Union supports a sovereign and united Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one of its underlying policy objectives is to accelerate the country's progress towards EU membership. Preparations should primarily be carried out by its elected representatives, who are directly responsible to the citizens, in line with a shared common vision of the country's pressing political, economic and social problems.

It is only as a single country that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the prospect of EU membership, and attempts to undermine State institutions will deprive citizens of the benefits that would come from EU integration. The political and institutional deadlock has prevented the country from pursuing much-needed reforms aimed at bringing the country closer to the EU, in particular, in key areas like state building, governance, and the application of the principles of the rule of law. Constitutional reform remains the key reform necessary for the transformation of Bosnia and Herzegovina into an effective and fully functional state. In a country with different levels of governance, close coordination is required between the various actors, and cooperation is needed to enhance its ability to speak with one voice. No coordination mechanism can substitute for much-needed political will. I firmly believe that the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the EU, and that the prospect of membership is one of the most unifying factors among the people of this country.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) Although it does highlight the innumerable issues blocking Bosnia and Herzegovina's path to EU accession, this report sets out to affirm that this country should join the EU. I do not believe that a country wracked with deep internal divisions that is therefore unable to push through laws and reforms, that is fraught with corruption, that lacks an independent judiciary, or sufficient legislative, executive or budgetary power, and where social dialogue is weak and youth unemployment is rising, can meet the requirements and obligations of EU accession. I therefore voted against.

Juozas Imbrasas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution because it assesses the progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina towards EU membership. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina still has to make a significant effort to implement the necessary reforms in order to become a full member of the EU. Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to ensure an independent, impartial and effective judicial system, establish a supreme court, combat corruption and its manifestations more effectively and fully implement the principle of the rule of law. It needs to combat trafficking in human beings and prosecute perpetrators, etc. I believe that the commitments made must be honoured and the deficiencies indicated in the report must be completely eliminated.

Lívia Járóka (PPE), *in writing*. – Bosnia and Herzegovina has developed its own national Roma strategy under the framework of which it has implemented four action plans in the priority areas of the Decade for Roma Inclusion. Despite some progress in the fields of housing and education, however, the situation of the country's Roma communities in terms of health care and education still remains alarming. There are significant structural problems with regard to the sustainability and transparency of action plans, the coordination among stakeholders at state and entity level, the allocation of funds and the monitoring of projects, in brief: despite the promising beginnings, the Decade initiative ran out of momentum. Moreover, the state-level social inclusion strategy for 2008-13 – recognising Roma as a priority group – is still not adopted. The government, entities and local authorities must sign up for the European Framework for National Roma Inclusion Strategies and,

after the expiration of the current and unsuccessful strategy, Bosnia and Herzegovina should develop and submit to the Commission its own complex Roma inclusion strategy up to 2020 with special regard to improving the cooperation among bodies and policy networks, eliminating parallel, overlapping or conflicting efforts, and creating synergies.

Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D), *in writing.* – (PL) I endorsed these reports. We have adopted three reports on enlargement: on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This might suggest that in the European Parliament, we are dominated by the problem of the economic crisis, a situation which often leads us to ask fundamental questions about whether the Union or the euro area will survive, whereas hard on the heels of Croatia, there are yet other countries which have declared their desire to join the European Union. This means that the way the Union is perceived from outside is very different from the way it is perceived from within. For many countries, the values associated with the European Union and the opportunities the Union gives in a Europe which is coming together and in a global world are something of value and an objective which they would like to achieve. So these votes are an encouragement to us to move faster and to increase our efforts to recover from the crisis, and to the EU's Member States to renew their confidence in the European Union and its institutions.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing.* – I voted for this report, which underlines the need for Bosnia and Herzegovina to effectively combat trafficking in human beings in cooperation with the international community, to prosecute perpetrators, to provide protection and compensation to the victims, and to raise awareness to prevent revictimisation by the authorities and society. It also calls for enhanced cooperation and partnership between competent authorities across various policy areas and NGOs from the country and the region and for the awareness of BiH police forces regarding human trafficking to be raised through the development of special training courses. Finally, it encourages the continuous support of the EU in the area of human trafficking, and asks for close cooperation on the matter between DG ELARG, DG HOME and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The European Union continues to be strongly committed to a sovereign and united Bosnia and Herzegovina, since one of the EU's underlying policy objectives is to accelerate the country's progress towards EU membership and thus help improve the quality of life for the benefit of all citizens. However, this progress requires functional institutions at all levels and commitment by the political leaders of the country. I believe the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina lies in the European Union and the prospect of EU membership is one of the most unifying factors amongst the people of the country. The primary responsibility for a successful EU accession process lies with this potential candidate country and preparations should be primarily carried out by those who are elected by and responsible to the citizens, in line with a shared common vision of the country's pressing political, economic and social problems. It is only as a single country that Bosnia and Herzegovina has the prospect of EU membership, so any division will only cast a shadow over its path towards accession. It also falls to Bosnia and Herzegovina to implement the measures necessary for achieving the objectives required by full accession to the EU.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing.* – It is important to encourage Bosnia to take further concrete steps to put the country firmly back on track towards the EU. Bosnia can enter the EU only as a single country; therefore, the undermining of state institutions will only deprive all its citizens from gaining the benefits of EU integration.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) I am essentially convinced that the states of the Western Balkans should be brought closer to the European Union. However, in order for this to be able to happen in a sensible manner, these countries need to meet the accession criteria and abide by European values. We are pleased to see from the progress report that Bosnia and Herzegovina has made progress in many areas. On many aspects of this matter, however, we do not share the view of the rapporteur. For example, she proposes that the federal structure enshrined in the Dayton Peace Agreement should, in the medium term, be dissolved in favour of a central state. The rejection of mother tongue teaching is not acceptable as far as I am concerned either, although there needs to be a voluntary opt-in option for multilingual teaching. Generally speaking, with regard to the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we should leave all options open. This does not rule out border changes either, for example, in the case of a positive referendum in one region with regard to joining a neighbouring state. For these reasons, I did not vote in favour of the progress report.

Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė (PPE), *in writing*. – (LT) I voted in favour of this resolution calling on the new government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to immediately take concrete steps so that this potential candidate country stays firmly on the path of European reforms and demonstrates the necessary progress in the near future. The process of European integration may become a key stabilising and consolidating factor, define the strategic direction of the country's development and help it to focus when implementing necessary domestic economic and social reforms. The agreement reached between the main political forces offers the hope that the European integration process will intensify. It should be noted that truth and justice are prerequisites for reconciliation. A broad and open internal dialogue on recent historical issues, as well as with other countries in the region, based on facts not emotions, is very important for the well-being of society and friendly coexistence with neighbours.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD), *in writing*. – (LT) I welcome this resolution. I believe that in 2011, Bosnia and Herzegovina has made limited progress towards stabilisation and social and economic development. Above all, in order to become a full member of the EU, Bosnia and Herzegovina must implement constitutional reforms and harmonise its four different legal systems. It should be noted that border issues with neighbouring countries need to be resolved as quickly as possible because only a single, sovereign and united country can be a member of the EU.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) In the last six months, Bosnia and Herzegovina has managed to form a new government and has adopted important laws on State aid and the population census. However, I agree with the representatives of the Commission and the Council who stressed that Bosnia and Herzegovina must remain active and reform its constitutional arrangements and legal system, agree on fiscal measures, ensure the formation of civil society, respect and implement human and social rights, and find means of stopping corruption, radicalisation and trafficking in human beings. The European Parliament calls on the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to be determined and united to achieve reforms and progress so that its people can live in a country, which is stable politically and growing stronger economically. I voted in favour of this report because I agree that the principles and objectives of the European Union's policies are helping the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and cooperation must continue so that this country can achieve greater progress.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted for this resolution of the European Parliament on the 2011 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina because I

believe that political dialogue between the European Parliament and the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities contributes to closer ties between the EU and that country, as well as to a healthy and sustainable neighbourhood policy.

Alojz Peterle (PPE), *in writing*. – (SL) I was happy to vote in favour of Ms Pack's realistic, balanced and open report, which examines true political positions on this country's European future.

Fiorello Provera (EFD), *in writing*. – (IT) I voted against this resolution, even if I agree with some of the conclusions contained in Ms Pack's report. I am not convinced by the underlying theory, the concept that, despite the critical areas, the EU accession process of Bosnia and Herzegovina should take place without pause for thought. There are still too many question marks about the real authority of the Balkan state. There are too many concerns about the effective independence of the judicial system, which is an indispensable requirement for guaranteeing the rule of law. Finally, too many criticisms can be levelled at the country with regard to its economy. In order for the European Union to be a driver of growth and political stability, it is fundamental that there should be a certain level of convergence between Member States, and Bosnia and Herzegovina does not currently have this.

Paulo Rangel (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Union is key to bringing this part of the Balkans closer to the EU. However, there are a number of obstacles to be overcome, such as the failings in the way the legal system operates, increasing corruption in the state apparatus, the high level of unemployment and the difficulty of cooperating with other countries in the region, Kosovo in particular. Moreover, since this is a multi-ethnic society, there is a need for close cooperation between the various stakeholders, so that they are better able to speak with one voice. As such, this report is of the greatest importance to the objective of speeding up the country's progress towards EU accession.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Bosnia and Herzegovina has been recognised as a potential candidate since as far back as the Thessaloniki Summit of 2003. The country has been engaged in the Stabilisation and Association Process since 2000, but the related stabilisation and association agreement (SAA) was only signed in 2008 and has not yet come into force, meaning that the request for Union accession has still not been officially made. The last Member State's ratification of the SAA in February 2011 ought to have led to its entry into force within 40 days, but the failure to comply with the obligations arising from preceding agreements made by Bosnia and Herzegovina has stopped the SAA in its tracks. The obligations in question relate to the adoption of laws on State aid, the national census and implementing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, which entail a constitutional amendment in order to extend electoral eligibility to members of ethnic minorities. Despite the ongoing difficulties of the domestic political situation, I think it is still decidedly in our interest to retain the country's ties to Europe, as this is the only way to ensure stability and progress. In the current situation, an increased EU presence on the ground is key and could help give fresh impetus to the internal reform process and, hence, the country's European prospects.

Kay Swinburne (ECR), *in writing*. – While further progress is still to be made in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly with respect to strengthening the central government and its institutions, I welcome the progress that has been made as outlined in the country's enlargement report. Nevertheless, further reforms need to be carried out in areas such as

the judiciary, protection of minorities, the economy and fighting corruption, which is hindering the socio-economic and political development of the country. The apparent rise of extremism needs to be investigated and appropriate action should be taken to eliminate this threat. The increased EU presence in the country, in the guise of an EU representative with a dual mandate of EU Special Representative and Head of Delegation responsible for offering advice, should assist the political process further.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing.* – (PT) The EU should continue its support for consolidating the territorial, social and economic cohesion of Bosnia and Herzegovina by stepping up its presence, specifically through the creation of a representative, and the technical and specialised support it has been providing through the EU Police Mission. There are a variety of structural problems affecting this country, which was devastated by the war in Yugoslavia and is still today suffering the tragic effects thereof. High levels of corruption; lack of confidence; the absence of a central government that provides both autonomy for local authorities and cohesive representation for all Bosnian citizens; lack of respect for differences in a multi-ethnic society; failure to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; low levels of growth and high levels of unemployment; and the lack of independence of the judiciary are some of the problems faced by Bosnian society. Following the agreement to form a government, Bosnia and Herzegovina is called on to start working towards the structural reforms required if they are to accede to the 27 in the future, which will bring the stability necessary for the region's development at the same time.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), *in writing.* – (RO) I voted for the European Parliament resolution on the 2011 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. The prospect of EU membership is one of the most unifying factors among the people of this country. I should emphasise the key role played by education in creating a multi-ethnic society and promoting an inclusive, non-discriminatory education system. I think that the quality of education needs to be improved to meet the demand of the labour market. With this in mind, I call on the Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities to remedy the shortcomings in vocational training in order to attract foreign direct investment, as well as to ensure that the accreditation of education institutions gets under way and the agencies dealing with the recognition of diplomas become fully operational. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, workers' and trade union rights are still limited. I call on the government to enhance these rights further and work towards harmonising the legal framework in this regard across the country.

I welcome the implementation of the Small Business Act and the efforts to provide financial support measures to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). I should stress the importance of setting up a register for compiling economic statistics and a single SME registration system for the entire country, which will help the number of SMEs grow and create a specific status for them.

Josef Weidenholzer (S&D), *in writing.* – (DE) The start of the accession negotiations with Serbia represents a historic milestone because the European perspective that is now possible for the Balkans could finally put an end to the deadlock in the former Yugoslavia. The current government in Serbia has contributed greatly to the removal of major obstacles. It deserves respect for that. More than 15 years after Dayton, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina still remains far behind what would have been expected and what should have been possible. The former partners in conflict are blocking each other. It is the leadership of the Serbian entity that stands out in particular as a result of a lack of sensitivity.

Influential circles are still working to bring about the collapse of the state. However, it is essential, now more than ever, that we insist on the inviolability of the integrity of the state. That is the only way that we can ensure the permanent achievement of what we all need: peace and prosperity in the countries of the Western Balkans.

Artur Zasada (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) At today's vote, I endorsed the document on the 2011 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina. After many months of stagnation, Bosnia and Herzegovina has once again chosen the path to European integration. There is certainly still much to be done. Changes to the constitution, improvement of the justice system and initiation of a wide range of political and economic reforms are unavoidable. Drawing up a long-term vision for development in the area of business is particularly important for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has the worst figures in the region in terms of attractiveness to investment. Restoring trust and creating investor-friendly conditions by removing administrative barriers and establishing the right legal framework will contribute to further economic growth, which will lead to a reduction in unemployment and greater prosperity for the population.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing.* – (PT) This resolution supports maintaining Bosnia as a protectorate of the EU, thereby contributing to keeping open the wounds of a civil war for which the great powers of the EU and NATO bear most of the responsibility. The majority in Parliament support the 'strengthened' EU Special Representative and continuation of the EU military operation, EUFOR Althea, rather than an end to their mandates. Instead of helping to heal the open wounds, the majority in Parliament are feeding the same situation of permanent instability that has afflicted the whole region since the end of Yugoslavia. EU accession must be essentially a sovereign decision by each people. A people without sovereignty – and the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina are without it – will be severely constrained in their decision regarding accession.

11. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 14.05 and resumed at 15.00)

IN THE CHAIR: OLDŘICH VLASÁK

Vice-President

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

13. Outcome of the presidential elections in Russia (debate)

President. - The next item on the agenda is the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on the result of the presidential elections in Russia.

I would like to announce an apology from the Vice-President of the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It has been agreed that Baroness Ashton will be represented by the Vice-President of the Commission, Mr Piebalgs, and by Mr Søvndal, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country holding the Presidency.

Villy Søvndal, *President-in-Office of the Council, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.* – Mr

President, first of all, I would like to express, both on my own behalf and on behalf of the High Representative, my most sincere and heartfelt condolences to all the parents and families in Belgium who have suffered such terrible losses in today's tragic accident in Switzerland. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of the victims and with the Belgian people.

After that, I will turn to Russia. Mr President, honourable Members, it is a pleasure to be here again today to discuss with you the outcome of the presidential elections in Russia on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Ashton.

Let me first of all thank Parliament for the strong voice it has consistently given to European citizens' concerns about democracy, fair elections and human rights in Russia.

Russia is our largest neighbour; it is an important business partner and a strategic partner on many global and regional issues. So it matters to our citizens what the situation is with regard to human rights and the rule of law in Russia. Parliament followed both the Russian State Duma elections on 4 December and the presidential elections on 4 March very closely. It has adopted several resolutions expressing the expectations of European citizens that Russia will live up to her international commitments to ensure free and fair elections.

You have also given High Representative/Vice-President Ashton several opportunities to address the plenary on these crucial issues. In addition, several hearings, organised by the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Subcommittee on Human Rights, the EU-Russia Parliamentary Cooperation Committee and individual political groups, have taken place since December on these elections and on human rights more generally. Catherine Ashton has asked me to thank Parliament for all this important work. She also asked me, in particular, to convey the message that she shares Parliament's concerns about the case of the arrest and death in pre-trial detention of lawyer, Sergey Magnitsky.

Restrictive measures are a sensitive instrument that should be considered in specific situations and in accordance with the respective EU guidelines.

The European External Action Service is currently looking into possible ways to convey our expectation that the investigation of this case will be taken forward properly.

The Russian presidential election went largely as expected. OSCE and Council of Europe observers gave a clear evaluation: opportunities were not equal during the preparations, and procedural violence occurred during the voting and counting process itself. We agree with their preliminary report and will remind Russia of its international commitment to free and fair elections.

High Representative/Vice-President Catherine Ashton issued a statement the day after the elections with five main elements. She recognised the clear victory of Vladimir Putin, noted international observers' recognition of the significant civic engagement in these elections, referred to international observers' findings of irregularities, encouraged Russia to address these shortcomings and looked forward to working with the incoming President and new government on our shared modernisation agenda, which should cover both economic and political reforms.

The day after the elections, outgoing President Medvedev instructed the Prosecutor General to examine the verdicts handed down to 32 convicts considered by the opposition as political prisoners, including Mikhail Khodorkovsky and his former business partner, Platon Lebedev. The President has also ordered the Justice Ministry to prepare a report on

the legal reasons for denying the registration of Mikhail Kasyanov's, Boris Nemtsov's and Vladimir Ryzhkov's People's Freedom Party. These are encouraging signals.

The next step: we have a strong consensus in the EU that we must engage with Russia – critically, yes, but also constructively. Without Russia, we cannot solve the regional challenges in our common neighbourhood, in Syria or Iran, or most of the pressing global challenges such as climate change and the environment. This approach has been quite successful recently. With Medvedev and the government led by Mr Putin, we have been able to build more constructive relations and to achieve results. Russian WTO accession is one key result that will bind this large economy into the international rules-based framework.

The Partnership for Modernisation is another one. Many projects have already been prepared and launched, including technical and regulatory modernisation as well as reforms of the judiciary and civil society involvement. We have also begun a process on common steps to be fulfilled before we could consider launching negotiations on a visa-waiver agreement. All of this will be of mutual benefit.

The new civic and political awakening in Russia has already led to some political reforms, with the first Duma reading of bills introduced by President Medvedev to liberalise political party registration rules and presidential candidates' registrations and to reinstall direct elections of regional governors.

The process is encouraging and will have consequences, especially in Russia's many regions. Change may be slower than one would hope, but we should have patience. It is a good thing that both authorities and protesters want gradual evolution, not revolution. A cautious but real dialogue has begun between them, and the quality and dynamics of the political situation in Russia have changed.

The key issue for us now is how we can support this reform process. The bilateral initiatives just mentioned provide us with an excellent basis to build on. As Cathy Ashton has stated, the EU looks forward to working with the incoming Russian President and the new government in full support of our shared modernisation agenda. The next major step in our Strategic Partnership, apart from all the ongoing regular work, will be the next EU-Russia Summit, due to be held in Russia just before the summer.

I thank you and look forward to hearing your views and to your resolution, which will be adopted tomorrow.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, Mr Søvndal, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, today's debate on Russia is of great concern to us and forces us to choose between what is desirable and what is possible.

The resolution that Parliament will have to vote on tomorrow addresses the very specific set of circumstances that have followed the presidential elections.

We are faced with an official Russia which still harks back to the era of the Soviet Union and which feels entitled to veto freedom within the United Nations Security Council. This is a Russia where the President and the Prime Minister shamelessly take turns to be in power. A Russia where elections are not held in compliance with international standards, and a Russia where opposition figures are detained, which takes us back to the recent and far from glorious past.

However, Mr President, this is also a Russia which is a member of the Council of Europe and of the World Trade Organisation, which duly collaborates with the OECD and wishes to become one of its members, and a Russia where, as in the Arab Spring countries, there are men and women who are fighting for their freedom and dignity.

Mr President, I think what is central to this resolution is to work for change and to open a space for dialogue and conversation with the opposition whose rights have been infringed and ignored.

We should leave until later, until Mr Swoboda's report, the issue of the institutional framework, the new association agreement between the European Union and Russia, two entities that need to come to an understanding.

Mr President, I think that from the viewpoint of the European Union – I would like to appeal to the President-in-Office of the Council and to the Commission's representative – that we should mobilise all our efforts and influence to make what is desirable become possible, so that fundamental freedoms and the rights of all will soon become a reality throughout Russia.

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, in recent times, we have, in fact, seen two elections in Russia that we could not describe as free and fair. Progress has been made compared with previous elections, but this progress is slight and, to a certain extent, it has been eliminated and the situation has deteriorated as a result of the behaviour of some leading officials.

In both cases, the problem started with the registration of the candidates. Many candidates who would doubtless have been permitted in other countries were not even able to take part in the elections. I believe that there is no justification for this, as the conditions set out for this are designed right from the start to make it impossible for some candidates to stand for election.

Secondly, we have to be critical of the reporting in various sections of the media, which was not at all balanced, in particular, in the electronic media, of course – after all, television is the most important media these days – even though the purely formal election broadcasts were fairly reasonably distributed. However, if Mr Putin took every opportunity to be seen as an animal lover and rescuer of the Siberian tiger, in whatever capacity, that is also clearly an indirect form of election campaigning.

Thirdly, there were also various instances of pressure being applied during voting, with the result that we are, unfortunately, having to give this critical appraisal of the elections. That met with unwillingness, incomprehension and resistance – which is also a sign of the progress of democracy and progress in the development of Russia. After all, whatever criticisms we have, people in Russia nevertheless now have the courage, to a greater extent than ever before, to go out onto the streets and demonstrate. It is then clear that some of our reactions should be rejected and repudiated. Thus, we absolutely must express our criticism if, for example, demonstrators are treated brutally or are imprisoned, at least for a time. These are things that we cannot tolerate. However, I would choose to see it as a positive sign that many demonstrations took place and, in many – although not all – cases, the police acted entirely properly.

In any case, it is not now a matter of arranging one of the umpteenth assessments of the elections; it is a matter of pointing out and emphasising the opportunity that now exists in Russia. I believe that is what matters. The purpose of this resolution is not to be yet

another one condemning the elections, although we are obviously also expressing some strong words of criticism regarding a few things. What is important now is to call on all sides finally to adopt a reform package. It is the chance for Mr Medvedev to finally stand up, still in his role as President, and say: I have caused something to happen in this country! After all the hopes that were placed in me and that for years were not fulfilled, I have now shown that something is happening. It is a chance for Mr Putin to begin his new Presidency with a reform programme and to say: yes, I have been much criticised, but now I will demonstrate that I am also capable of taking Russia forward in terms of democracy and modernisation. It is also a chance for the opposition to show that not only can it oppose, but it can also exert an influence. That ought to be the message from this House. We want to join together to support the forces in Russia that want reforms and that want to say that Russia must take a new path into the new millennium that has already begun. Russia must carry out its reforms. It must become more democratic, because one thing has to be clear: modernisation without democracy cannot work, and therefore there needs to be more democracy in Russia along with more modernisation.

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

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR), *Blue-card question.* – (PL) Mr President, Mr Swoboda, I share your hope, Mr Swoboda, that developments in Russia afford a certain amount of hope for optimism, but I do not share your opinion that these elections represent progress, as you said. I think they do not. However, I would like to ask the following question: do you not think that the resolution we are debating could be stronger, because if the representatives of the European External Action Service, who are diplomats, are speaking more forcefully on human rights issues than the European Parliament, does this not mean that we have not lived up to certain expectations?

Ewald Stadler (NI), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr Swoboda, I have two questions for you. You said that the elections in Russia were not fair or free. How then do you view the contradiction that arises from the fact that a member of your own party, Mr Schennach, a socialist member of the *Bundesrat*, who, like me, was an observer in Russia, said in a press conference that the elections were surprisingly free and fair?

My second question is this. You criticised the fact that during the election campaign, indirect campaigning was carried out on television in Russia by government reporting. How then do you explain the Austrian Government's coverage, where three quarters of all reports on the Austrian broadcaster ORF were devoted to the government under your Chancellor Faymann?

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), *Blue-card question.* – (NL) Mr President, I am pleased that you have given me the opportunity to put another question to Mr Swoboda.

I have been following your fine words closely, Mr Swoboda, but can we really speak of elections here? Elections? Now, those entail a whole process, surely? A process in which certain rules are followed, where all parties standing are recognised? You have, yourself, expressed a great deal of criticism. My final question to you therefore is: are you prepared to acknowledge these as elections? Are you prepared to acknowledge Mr Putin as President of the Russian Federation in the knowledge that these elections were actually not free, normal or fair? That is the essential question, surely?

Hannes Swoboda (S&D), *Blue-card answer to three questions.* – (DE) Fellow Members, as we can see, there are very different assessments of this matter. I would just like to remind

you that this is not about our circumstances and whether or not we recognise something. What is important here is that there is now a chance to further a reform process. If the opposition in Russia says that it now wants to implement reforms, should we then say 'no, you cannot do that because this is a false system, as these were not proper elections'? Let us not try to be holier than the Pope, but let us try to help the opposition in Russia. Let us help the opposition to do something, and, Mr Migalski, of course we could criticise a great deal more. The question is, however: how can we help the two to come together? After all, the main thing that we are interested in if we want a partner in Russia is that we have a partner that is strong and democratic. That is my goal. It is not about the past; it is about the future, and that is also what the opposition wants.

To Mr Stadler, who is new to this House, I would say: we are not talking about Austria today; we are talking about Russia. Perhaps you did not notice that. It is about Europe and Russia – that is the key issue – and next time, I would like us to be able to talk of genuinely free elections. These elections were still not free and fair, but let us help the opposition to find a solution with Mr Medvedev, so that Mr Putin will become a different President because he has different rules. We will not be able to change Mr Putin, but, with our support, the opposition can now change the rules according to which Mr Putin governs.

Kristiina Ojuland, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, today we are not speaking about Magnitsky or Khodorkovsky and other cases, but that does not mean that we have forgotten those cases; we will come back to those issues later.

We are speaking today about the elections, or so-called elections; the presidential elections in Russia, and I must say that yesterday, the ALDE Group in this Parliament organised a very good, extensive hearing on the results of the presidential elections, We have Ms Garzinova and Mr Kasparov two opposition leaders visiting Strasbourg today; they are also on the balcony here now; they were actually telling their first-hand experience of these elections.

Our group Chair, Mr Verhofstadt, also visited Moscow on 5 March right after the elections and he was on the streets. He saw that the military presence was so enormous and the people had not seen such a military presence since 1993. Speaking about these elections and the fraud which has been reported by the OSCE, ODIHR and also the Council of Europe, it is extraordinary: they are even increasing the results from the Soviet times when normally, the polling stations did not have more than 99.9% attendance. Now they were 100% in Chechnya.

It is clear that the results, the conclusions, are evidence that these elections were not free; these elections were not fair. This is now the question for the international question: what does it really mean? What kind of consequences should we draw from this? Is this President legitimate? Is the Duma, which was elected in the same manner in December, legitimate? How can they be partners with the European Union and the rest of the international community? That is the question.

Werner Schulz, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the election observers from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) found that the Russian presidential elections were neither free nor fair. The local election observers were also able to verify that the official final result was not correct. Although Mr Putin's campaign leaders claimed that this was the cleanest election that Russia has ever experienced, it leads, conversely, to the conclusion that things

were not all above board in the previous elections. That goes for the fraudulent Duma elections, in particular.

Under the restrictive conditions and one-sided advantages, we cannot exclude the fact that Vladimir Putin narrowly won the presidential elections. However, it was an election with no alternatives, a victory without opponents, as Mr Putin's challengers were not on the ballot slip but on the street protesting against his policies. It was to be expected that, with all his resources and with all the power that he has over the state apparatus and the media, Mr Putin should decide the election in his favour in the first round. That is one way to win elections, but not the country's confidence for the future. We need to take note of that, but we should hold back on our congratulations as far as possible.

The government of Russia has, unfortunately, missed the opportunity to overcome the existing division in society by holding fair elections. However, Russia needs these critical and creative citizens in order to develop. Their exclusion would only lead to further emigration and outflow of capital. Mr Putin has been in power for 12 years. His promise of stability means, in practice, stagnation. He will at best get the publicised military reform under way, entailing armament on a huge scale. The repeatedly promised economic and social modernisation is, to a large extent, yet to be realised. Rather, the most recent defamatory statements suggest that he remains trapped in his outdated world view, his KGB methods and the constraints of an autocratic system. That is why there are great expectations of the opposition. It must now attempt to ensure that the street protests do not become an empty ritual and just a roll-call count. Of course, political change in Russia must be desired and supported by civil society itself, but we, the EU, can assist this process by supporting, on the basis of a new electoral law, the unobstructed approval of parties and a fair and transparent election campaign, the challenge of the protest movement and its main demand for early Duma elections. That should speed up the structuring and setting of objectives called for by the opposition and, ultimately, demonstrate that there is an electable alternative to Vladimir Putin in Russia.

Paweł Robert Kowal, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, I have the impression that both our pragmatism and our importance in the world today demand that in this House, we say what those elections were really like. Perhaps the simplest solution would be not to adopt any resolution at all, if while we sit here, having been returned in democratic elections held across Europe, we cannot see the difference between elections which are democratic and elections which quite simply do not deserve to be called elections. So perhaps sometimes, we should simply not adopt a resolution, but if we do, we should put it in a single sentence: not everyone who wanted to stand in these elections was able to do so, and these elections have not contributed anything to democracy – they have nothing to do with democracy at all. Today, it is this kind of realism which we need, and not a realism in which we write things that are not true and in which we write these things over and over again and then become the object of ridicule. I say this because we, too, are losing the position we have enjoyed as the European Parliament, and the European Union is not being treated as a serious organisation. So today, I would like us to tell it like it is in Russia, since we have decided to draft this resolution, but if not, then sometimes in life it is better to say nothing.

Secondly, we have to speak to those who are on the streets and say to them that we understand the young generation and its protests. Russia is not any different from any other post-Soviet country. We must tell them very clearly that if force is used, we will take the same action as we have taken in every other case, and the use of force must today be a

borderline which we set, here in this House. We have to be certain that on this issue, we are now definitely in agreement – both we, who sit on this side of the House, and those who sit on that side. I am in no doubt that this also includes Mr Swoboda, whom I know and respect. This should be said clearly here, today.

Helmut Scholz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to address my words expressly to Mr Swoboda. Your first motion for a resolution was pleasantly balanced and specifically unemotional with regard to what can be said following the presidential elections. In signing the European Convention on Human Rights, the Russian leadership made a voluntary commitment that it is not fulfilling. These elections, too, were once again not fair or free of fraud. Even a EUR 300 million investment in surveillance technology by the government did not solve a problem that can only be solved at a political level. These are the sober facts that do not leave us, as a partner, indifferent. They also highlight the contradictory nature of a Russian society, which, as everyone can see, is nevertheless changing. This is something we should welcome and support, because emerging democracies thrive on efforts to develop and change, and also on protests. Russia is becoming normal.

I therefore consider a number of the conclusions drawn by some of my colleagues here in Parliament to be politically wrong. There must be no compromises in the text here, either. This House must finally decide what line it wants to take. At the 'Russia after the Elections' event yesterday, organised by the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I discovered that some Members are of the opinion that Russia is no longer normal. Was it ever normal? They believe it represents a potential danger and that we cannot simply carry on as before, but must now finally take a different course.

I would just like to say something about this. Those who want to think in terms of escalation spirals should now explain how far they want to go with this and, moreover, not only in terms of where that leaves our partnership. For all the justified criticism and all of the differences, partnership for me means, above all, a balance in terms of our common interests, and, at least in my mother tongue, partnership and subordination are not synonyms. People who advocate this path are also saying, as far as I can see, that they do not believe in the power of society to change and that they have not taken note of the changes in Russian society, to which, incidentally, the reports of the election observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) also refer, as here is where alternatives to the Putin-steered democracy are being sought. All of this must, ultimately, be discussed in political terms.

The dynamism that some people are currently developing here in this House following the elections is something that I consider to be disconcerting, however. In my view, it cannot be reconciled with the political dignity and self-perception of a House that stands for plurality in Europe if representatives of part of the Russian opposition here in Strasbourg were able, unchallenged, to discredit the alternative presidential candidates by describing them simply as 'Putin's pigs', when these candidates, without rectification of the election fraud, received the vote of more than 25 million citizens in Russia. Despite knowledge to the contrary, these same people have been speaking for weeks in this House, likewise unchallenged, of the possible bloodshed caused by Mr Putin and of potential revolutions.

All I can say is that it is not the clear majority in this House that is deliberately taking the wrong course in its criticism of the elections in Russia.

Niki Tzavela, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (EL) Mr President, if we consider the efficacy of the institutional bodies established between the European Union and Russia, we will find that little progress has been made when it comes to any *rapprochement* between the two parties.

Why is that? Does it not concern us? Perhaps both sides are making a mistake and we cannot be efficient when it comes to relations between Europe and Russia. If we really want cooperation with Russia, and I consider that we desperately need that cooperation, we need to carefully design a new approach. The accession of Russia to the World Trade Organisation is a big, new and very good step.

So far, what the European Union and the European Parliament have been doing is to denounce everything that is happening in Russia. All we do is denounce. That attitude is not productive or creative. On the contrary, I believe that it is slowing down and hampering *rapprochement* between the two sides. We unilaterally consider Russian issues at a time when, first of all, we need multi-faceted cooperation in the trade, energy, culture and education sectors, before moving on to the human rights sector.

I should like to relay a personal experience to you. Years ago, I met an Arab leader who is today one of the fallen Arab leaders. At that time, he had just returned from Moscow and he described how he and President Putin had agreed that 'these Europeans want to tell us how to govern our countries'.

I believe, therefore, that there is a big divide between European culture and certain countries. I also believe that we must lead the way towards *rapprochement* with those countries.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, we all know that there are deficiencies in Russia in relation to democracy and human rights. There is no doubt about that. However, the path of the former motherland of real socialism towards an open democracy is a long one, and Russia should not be measured by Western standards. I also believe, however, that Mr Putin's new presidential term represents an opportunity now to take a new step towards further democratisation, that there is a chance to review the imprisonment of political prisoners, that the non-registration of opposition parties could be examined and that Mr Putin's election promise to tackle corruption could become a reality. We ought to give Russia this chance. In general, I believe that we Europeans should not always wag our finger with democratic superiority. There are enough democratic deficiencies in the EU, too. Recall that only recently, the period of office of the President of the European Council, Mr Van Rompuy, was extended without any democratic legitimacy.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, Parliament has rightly expressed a lot of criticism about the way in which the Duma Elections were held. What really struck me is that one still knows nothing of what really went on in these presidential elections. Yes, on election day itself, everything may have proceeded in a relatively normal fashion, but the way in which the votes were counted the next day and, also, the candidates nominated, as well as the role of the media in the run-up to the elections, was simply unacceptable.

I believe that Russia, a country that is also a member of the Council of Europe, ought not to permit itself to act in that kind of a fashion because it, too, has to keep to the rules.

Mr President, there are also some hopeful signs. I have never seen such peaceful opposition, such a peaceful gathering of ordinary civilians, turning out on the streets, protesting and showing that they can no longer take what happens in the Kremlin seriously. What we have to do today is ensure that we bring those people, those peaceful marchers, together

with those in the Kremlin or in the Duma who are also willing to carry out reforms; we need to bring them together. That is the text of our resolution. And that is why we all ought to accept Mr Swoboda's proposals.

As far as the other aspects of this matter are concerned, in a few months, Mr Swoboda will come up with a new text that we will then be able to refine further.

Knut Fleckenstein (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that the progress to greater democracy in Russia is no longer stoppable. I am also convinced, however, that our Parliament, our groups, the parties behind these groups and the foundations could, and must, do more to help Russia as good friends and advisors.

Since the Duma elections, there have been numerous demonstrations and the involvement of civil society has increased dramatically. It is not only politicians who have taken to the streets; there are also many citizens, consisting increasingly of middle class, well-educated people and people who have educated themselves further through travel. We need to step up our dialogue and increase our contact with these people and ensure that there is more people-to-people contact, including by dealing swiftly with the outstanding issues relating to visa-free travel.

However, we should step up our parliamentary dialogue now, too. I know that some people think less dialogue is the right response to the elections. I think that is wrong. We need more talks with our colleagues from the State Duma in order to discuss and to persuade and to offer them our experience. In so doing, we should present our views clearly so that our colleagues there can also learn from our experience and avoid the mistakes that we have made, and continue to make. We will best achieve this through clear dialogue and by showing as little as possible of the superior attitude that we sometimes see in this House.

The Partnership for Modernisation is a good instrument for this purpose. We surely all agree that economic and technological modernisation is not sufficient and that without modernisation of the law, politics and society, Russia, and therefore our joint partnership, cannot succeed.

Edward McMillan-Scott (ALDE). – Mr President, it is quite clear that Mr Putin has no friends in this Chamber, even though Mr Swoboda believes somehow that Mr Medvedev's promises will turn into reality.

But Mr Kowal says that we should tell it like it is, and our resolution would be a credit to Cathy Ashton. I believe that the European Parliament should stop 'business as usual' with the Putin regime. I think the EU should stop playing it safe. I think we should use all the measures at our command to put pressure on the Putin regime for genuine reform. We should stop discussing fruitless treaties and start being unsafe. Let us start with the Chamber next door.

In the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, David Cameron's MPs – 18 of them – sit with 16 members of the United Russia party from the Duma. This House has recommended that the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe should regard the Duma delegation as illegitimate. Mr Kowal, let us, as you say, tell it like it is and let us start at home, in the European Union, where people play games with politics. You have said that the European Union is losing respect. Yes, because we do not tell it like it is. So let us start here, and the next resolution we pass on Russia should not be something that looks as if it comes from the EEAS, but something that comes from the European Parliament.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to say first of all that Mr Kowal and myself are now no longer members of Poland's Law and Justice party, and we take a very dim view of the fact that in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, members of Law and Justice sit together with members of the United Russia party. I would like to say that what is happening in Russia today must give rise to fundamental doubts about the democratic character of that country. In this House today, no one is in any doubt that the elections in Russia were not true elections – and that the opposition in Russia is being persecuted – not just in terms of the procedure for counting votes itself, although practically every day brings to light new facts about how the counting of votes was not conducted fairly during the recent presidential elections, because democracy is, of course, something more than just the technical process of voting and of counting the votes – it is also all the circumstances: freedom of the media, freedom of political parties and freedom of speech. These things do not exist in Russia, and so even if a technically fair system of voting was guaranteed – going to the ballot box, casting your vote and the fact of counting that vote – even then we would not be able to speak of fair elections in Russia, because nothing else besides the technical act of voting is democratic in Russia. Today, the European Union should be taking a much stronger line because – and I want to say this very clearly – the Russian people deserve freedom, and this is what we wish them.

Nick Griffin (NI). – Mr President, as an observer in Moscow at the Duma elections, I witnessed a robust system which is far more democratic than the fraud-ridden shambles in Britain. If observers come to elections in London this May, they will find hundreds of thousands of non-existent ghosts voting by post without any kind of ID check. They will see flimsy cardboard ballot boxes with voting papers falling out of gaps at the bottom, mainly under the control of appointees of Baroness Ashton's Labour Party.

At least the Russians have elections. Baroness Ashton became one of the most powerful figures in post-democratic Europe without a single vote. And who elected the technocrats now asset-stripping occupied Greece and Italy?

We all know the real reasons for the attacks on Putin. George Soros and his banker friends want to privatise and loot Russia just like they are looting the West. So forget about the specks of dust in Mr Putin's eye and remove the giant planks of electoral fraud and elite greed from the European Union's.

Elmar Brok (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Søvndal, Commissioner, when I hear speeches like that last one, I simply have to acknowledge that values have clearly got very confused here. If someone believes that the United Kingdom does not have full democracy, but that Mr Putin is a model for democracy, then I simply have to say that the right has a way of looking at the world that I can no longer understand.

I believe that the Duma elections were fraudulent and that we need to realise that in these Duma elections and in the presidential elections, candidates from the opposition who expressed criticism did not have any real opportunity to become candidates, because the way the elections were organised meant that they were not able to stand for election. At the same time, we are seeing a new middle class who are seeking to inform themselves and who want freedom, democracy and the rule of law in order, by such means, to develop a modern, economically sound, middle class-based state on the basis of the rule of law. I believe that we should support this. These people stand for the future of Russia in the interests of Russia. President Medvedev has now made an offer in a working group with the non-parliamentary opposition parties to make progress in terms of reforms. We intend

to watch closely to see whether any steps forward are agreed on and implemented on the initiative of the next President. That is what this resolution is about. We want to see whether promises are kept here and whether words are transformed into action and the path to reform is taken. Allowing these reforms really would give President Putin the opportunity to achieve a fruitful Presidency. If this does not happen, Russia will develop into an authoritarian, dictatorial regime. For that reason, we would like to observe whether the opposition is treated fairly during the period leading up to the inauguration of President Putin.

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

Werner Schulz (Verts/ALE), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr Brok, you rightly mentioned that, based on all the information available to us, the Duma elections were fraudulent, and you expressed the hope that this working group that President Medvedev has convened in order to draw up a new electoral law and provide a simpler procedure for the approval of parties will bear fruit. Will you support the amendment tomorrow relating to the main demand of the opposition, on the basis of the results from Mr Medvedev's working group, for there to be early Duma elections?

Ewald Stadler (NI), *Blue-card question.* – (DE) Mr Brok, I would like to ask you whether you have already spoken to your fellow group Member, Ms Gardini from Italy, who I personally met as an election observer in Russia during these presidential elections, and who said in a public press conference that these elections were fair and free?

Elmar Brok (PPE), *Blue-card answer to two questions.* – (DE) I am not aware of this statement, but if it was made, I would class it as nonsense, as nonsense is sometimes found in all parties.

With regard to the question put to me by Mr Schulz, I would say that we will see what reforms are implemented there and draw conclusions from that. I believe it is important, first of all, that the conditions are created for the rule of law to be in place, for it to be easier for parties to register, for this registration not to be manipulated by the authorities so that signatures are not recognised, or for fewer signatures to be sufficient for registration. Freedom of the press is necessary in order for opposition parties to have a fair chance of holding their own in an election campaign.

These are some of the conditions that are necessary for further democratic development to be possible in Russia, and I believe that these will then enable the relevant conclusions to be drawn. We need to take one step at a time and not prevent the first step being taken by emphasising the third step.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – (LT) Mr President, I was in Russia to observe the Duma elections and, three months later, the Presidential elections. Despite the fact that during the Duma elections in one of Moscow's districts, I bore witness to electoral fraud, this was also recorded on video by one of the members of the Central Election Commission, and as I returned from Russia, I was not overly depressed. My biggest impression was the huge public interest in the elections in Moscow and St Petersburg and the sincere desire of many people, particularly young people, to prevent any fraud. Undoubtedly, this was mostly demonstrated by those members and observers of the Central Election Commission who supported opposition parties and opposition Presidential candidates. It is therefore very regrettable that more parties and Presidential candidates were artificially prevented from participating in both elections, and that in the media, the government's party and candidates

enjoyed greenhouse conditions, while the opposition had to endure political draughts and cold.

However, that desire to finally organise honourable and fair elections ran through not thousands, but hundreds of thousands and millions of Russian citizens, as demonstrated by the mass demonstrations in Moscow, St Petersburg and elsewhere. Surveys show that 10 years ago, Russia's progress down the European road would have been supported by approximately 20% of the country's population, whereas now such a route would be chosen by 30%, and more than half of Russia's youth. This tendency allows us to take a more optimistic view of Russia's future, but it should be remembered that around 40% would like a particular Russian road that may lead even further from democracy and human rights. I therefore very much support those colleagues who are in favour of intensifying dialogue with Russia at all levels and using all European Union opportunities so that we encourage Russia to take the European road.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I do not want to repeat everything we have talked about today because I think almost all of us are agreed as to the fact that the situation in Russia is bad and that the elections were neither free nor fair, although unfortunately, even today, there have been voices saying that these elections were a step forward. I do not think this is the case, neither do most of my fellow Members. However, I hope you will all also allow me to draw attention to the procedure for adopting this resolution, because the way this resolution has been taken through its successive stages has also had the effect of hindering its progress and work to strengthen it. It is a weak resolution and, in my view, Mr McMillan-Scott and other speakers in the House are right when they say that this resolution should be stronger and that it is the European Parliament's role to make it stronger. Therefore, I have the honour of asking you all at tomorrow's sitting to support three amendments tabled by the European Conservatives and Reformists Group which strengthen this weak resolution. I am counting on your votes.

Ewald Stadler (NI). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this Parliament and, above all, the majority of the speakers in this House, are acting as if the Russian citizens were children. That is not the case. Russians know very well who they want to elect and who they do not want to elect, and they wanted stability. That is what I have been told in numerous conversations that I have had with Russian citizens on the streets, unobserved and unimpeded. They want stability, and they never again want a return to the thieving times experienced under the government of Mr Yeltsin.

I was an election observer myself and I only met a single Member of this House, that being Ms Gardini from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats). I visited polling stations in the provinces 1 200 kilometres from Moscow. There were election observers for the candidates in all polling stations, particularly for Gennady Zyuganov, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Mikhail Prokhorov. Committees were present and there were transparent, sealed ballot boxes. There were webcams in 15% of the polling stations, so that people could watch the elections themselves at home via the Internet. Everything that has been claimed here regarding the presidential elections in Russia is, from my subjective observation, incorrect. I do not wish to say anything about the Duma elections, but I observed the presidential elections for myself and what is being said here is not true.

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

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR), *Blue-card question.* – (PL) Mr President, Mr Stadler, I fully agree with you, Mr Stadler, that the Russians are not little children. I am certain that most

Russians are smarter than you are – I am certain of this. I would like to ask you if you know what the situation is like for the media in Russia? Do you know how many free television stations, free radio stations and independent newspapers there are in Russia?

Ewald Stadler (NI), *Blue-card answer.* – (DE) Mr Migalski, this media market does not operate any differently than the Austrian media market. We are used to it. In Austria, our broadcasting service was operated by a state monopoly until 10 years ago. No one discussed Austria in this House on account of this. On state television, the coverage relates almost exclusively to the government. Thus, there is no great difference here. I am aware of these things. Believe me, it is very condescending for everything that is not in line with the mainstream in this House to be denounced as nonsense, like Mr Brok did in relation to his own fellow group Member, Ms Gardini, or like you have just done. I was there and saw things for myself, and I will not allow you to turn my own observations around.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mr Søvnal, Commissioner, I would first like to make a small comment on the way business is conducted in the House. I would like to say that I asked to speak under the blue-card procedure twice and, unfortunately, Mr President, you did not notice. This was during the speeches made by Mr Mølzer and Mr Fleckenstein, but since I have now been given the opportunity to speak by my political group, I would like to say – and I am speaking now to Mr Fleckenstein – I hope you think that we should be having a dialogue today not just with the Duma, particularly in this situation, where the opposition has been pushed out of the Duma and, in some cases, opposition candidates were prevented from standing in the presidential elections, but that we should also be having a dialogue with political forces in Russia which are outside parliament, which today are either emerging new political parties or non-governmental organisations such as associations and others. In my opinion, we should also be engaging in dialogue with these groups and these candidates.

I also have a comment about our resolution. In the resolution, we address ourselves to President Medvedev. I think that before we adopt the resolution, we should note that, firstly, during his term of office, President Medvedev has not been the person making the strategic decisions on matters of Russian policy, and secondly, he is already, in fact, the outgoing President today, so we should really be addressing our appeals to President Putin, who is going to take over as President in Russia again soon.

President. - Mr Lisek, sorry about the first blue card. I saw only one and I gave you more time for your speech.

Boris Zala (S&D). - Mr President, many have argued that the EU should radically rethink its Russian policy; that it cannot be business as usual after months of protests and Vladimir Putin's return to the Kremlin after the presidential elections. Let me say that such a policy shift would be a strategic blunder.

The EU should continue to do what it is doing, only do it better. Our current approach, a strategic but critical engagement with Russia, remains sound and it is working. I agree with Mr Fleckenstein that what is happening in Russia today is a political awakening of the middle class. The ever louder demands for political reform in Russia are a direct consequence of its economic prosperity and openness to the world, but that prosperity and openness is, in a large part, due to the density and volume of the EU-Russia interactions: investments, trade, tourism and all that.

We need more of that, including visa-free travel in the future. I am not saying that we should not be critical of the Russian Government whenever it disregards human rights or fails to uphold the principles of the rule of law and democracy but, in the end, constructive engagement will do more to advance our values in Russia than tough talk in rigid positions. Therefore, I would say that recent events in Russia and the presidential elections actually present a case for staying the course in terms of our policy. In that framework, I support the resolution.

Nadezhda Neynsky (PPE). – (BG) Mr President, a generation ago, the principled position of the Western world in defending democracy, freedom and human rights contributed to the end of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Two decades on, the challenge facing Europe is to prove that freedom and democracy are still of the highest value and that there is no political situation pushing them into the background.

It is the duty of Europe's leaders to prove this, first of all, to their own electorate, some of whom are recently starting to wonder both secretly and openly whether the era of division lines did not provide them with greater peace of mind. It is the duty of Europe's leaders to prove this to the reformers of the Arab Spring who have embraced the ideas for change, having believed in the democratic ideals, and not on the basis of a geographical or historical affinity for Europe. They owe it also, now more than ever, to the thousands of democratically minded citizens in Russia who have come out in protest against the gross, large-scale human rights violations, the rigged elections and the acts of repression against the independent media. Their demands are mostly for uncompromising anti-corruption laws.

I firmly believe that what will turn Europe into an actual player in the democratic process in Russia is not the comfortable stance of a distant observer restricted to glib phrases and loads of non-binding recommendations. As Russia's biggest trade partner, and especially as a major attraction for its assets, Europe has sufficient mechanisms available to guarantee both compliance with fundamental democratic rights and an effective battle against corruption, principles which it should place at the heart of its cooperation with Russia.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) Mr President, numerous valid criticisms have been made but I would caution against our using a hectoring tone, because it is counter-productive. As the elections have shown, there is no *de facto* equal opportunity when it comes to the electoral law, the party law and access to the media. However, the fact is that the name of the President of the Russia Federation is Vladimir Putin, and the European Union needs to cooperate with him. Whether Putin's reform of the political system or the economy succeeds is primarily in Russia's interests, but also in the interest of the European Union. The Putin system has exhausted its own political reserves. More press freedom and more democracy are needed. However, an even bigger problem is that Russia has fallen behind the other BRIC countries in economic terms.

If the Russian economy is not modernised and developed, then tensions can arise that threaten social stability. It is in the interest of the European Union for Russia to be a stable and developing country.

Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (PPE). – Mr President, for the elections to be truly fair, full access must be granted to all candidates, not just those who the authorities allow to take part. In the same way, the recent presidential elections are neither fair nor democratic. Nevertheless, a majority of the Russian people continue to support Vladimir Putin, now President, and before that, Prime Minister, and before that, President.

The rulers in the Kremlin feel that support but they must realise that a lack of democracy breeds corruption and deprives the citizens of their dignity. Events in North Africa and the Middle East are showing that sooner or later, people will rebel against corruption and will come out on the streets to demand to be treated with respect. The same is true of Russia and the democratic reforms are essential in Russia if future turbulence is to be avoided. Turbulence is different from the recent peaceful demonstrations and I think this is one of the results of these elections.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE). - (ES) Mr President, Russia is very important to the European Union both as a neighbouring European country and as a global actor and permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This is why we would like to have a closer relationship with Russia so that we can address issues of mutual interest and for reasons of global governance.

However, there are obstacles to such a close relationship. We regret Russia's behaviour during the Syrian crisis, and certain recent events, like December's elections to the Duma, and the presidential elections on 4 March, have left us feeling disappointed and concerned. The elections did not conform to the democratic standards of a European country which is a member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE.

As I have said, it is in our interests to have a relationship of mutual trust with Russia, but the fundamental basis of this relationship should be shared democratic values, joint respect for human rights, the multi-party system and respect for the democratic opposition.

The modern Russia we want to see is a Russia which shares European values. We can build the close relationship we want on the basis of these values.

Corina Crețu (S&D). - (RO) Mr President, an initial conclusion of the demonstrations and elections in Russia is that Russian civil society has become stronger and may be able to generate an alternative to the current regime. I think that pragmatism should prevail in the EU's relations with the Kremlin administration, but this should not imply a waiver of our political and moral values. Russia should be aware that our position on the respect of human rights and democratic and transparent government is not negotiable.

The European Union should also make it clear to Moscow that its position on regimes such as the one in Syria is not in favour of peoples suffering because of totalitarian governments. I think it is important for the new administration to condemn what is happening in Syria, particularly within the United Nations. On the other hand, it would be desirable for the European Union and Member States to speak the same language when it comes to key dimensions of relations with the Russian Federation, such as energy policies.

Norica Nicolai (ALDE). - (RO) Mr President, for very many of us who lived in the shadow of Russia in communist regimes, the outcome of these elections is no other than the election of Vladimir Putin as President. I would not want to delude ourselves and see things only from a certain perspective. For a very long time to come, Russia will find itself between Asian-style modernisation and European-style democracy. There is no doubt that those 30% of Russian citizens who are motivated to choose their European model are worth our investment. I emphasise that our partnership with Russia should focus on strengthening a civil society and an opposition which, hopefully, will no longer be divided.

About the elections: they were certainly neither free nor transparent, judging by our standards. Elections should not be assessed only in relation to the voting day, but against the whole general context. However, I think that if our partnership remains a privileged policy, we need to carry on with realism.

Laima Liucija Andrikienė (PPE). - Mr President, the European Union, as Russia's direct neighbour, has followed with particular interest the election process and widespread ongoing protests in Russia on both the state Duma and presidential elections. We observed the so-called carousel voting on election day, vote fraud, and other irregularities and shortcomings reported by international observers.

Taking all this into account, as well as the announcement of potentially competitive candidates and TV broadcasting during the election campaign, which was 90% dominated by one candidate, we cannot draw any other conclusion than, firstly, that the presidential elections were neither free nor fair and, consequently, the legitimacy of the President-elect is questionable. Secondly, the Russian people are fighting for free elections and they deserve our support and solidarity. Finally, arrests of dozens of peaceful protestors across Russia during demonstrations after the disputed victory of Vladimir Putin deserve our condemnation. All this has to be stated in our resolution.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, economically and politically, Russia is the most important neighbour of the European Union. The presidential elections in this country are an important decision by its citizens on the nature of the state, since crucial political power is concentrated in the hands of the democratically elected President of the country.

The elections, which were clearly won by Vladimir Putin, were accompanied by a number of objections by the opposition, whose leaders, however, received little public support. Doubts about the absolute fairness of the election process were also confirmed by independent observers from the OSCE. At the same time, however, they noted that none of the candidates standing against Vladimir Putin had a real chance of succeeding. I therefore think it appropriate to respect the fact that no significant political force is profiled in Russia today that would represent a real alternative to those currently in power for us or, in particular, the citizens of Russia.

In a healthy society, an open, political dialogue must take place in a free media environment, and that should be our main goal for Russia as well, so that the opposition, which is unsuccessful for the time being, will be able to show its true political potential in a new environment of freedom.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). - Mr President, a substantial number of Russian citizens have clearly said that is enough. What the EU has now to take as a basis for its further relationship with Russia is the fact that both the new parliament and President have lost political credibility. Therefore, the least this Parliament can do is to declare clearly and firmly that these elections have been neither fair nor free.

But the question is: what next? Can we rely upon the promises expressed by Mr Medvedev or Mr Putin for electoral reform? I think we have to seek the opportunity to try to bring together the Russian opposition with the present leadership to work out a national compromise – but it should be a constructive compromise – to set a date for new elections after the new reform.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). - Mr President, so we are all supposed to get exercised about the state of democracy in Russia? In fact, the enemies of democracy are

much closer to home. In 2004, Belgium banned the Vlaams Blok, as though banning political parties was quite consistent with democracy. In Germany, in 2001, there were attempts to ban the MPD on the basis of evidence that was found by the Constitutional Court to have been fabricated by state agents. Was this in Communist East Germany? No, it was in the Federal Republic. In the UK, the BBC is a law unto itself. If you are an establishment stooge, you have unlimited access. If you are a genuine opponent of the establishment, you are talked about but rarely given access.

At least the Internet is free, or so we thought. However, yesterday in this Chamber, we saw establishment politicians and an EU commissar – yes, you did hear that correctly – drooling about the possibility of using EU and Dutch law to close down the website of the Dutch Freedom Party and prosecute and jail its leader.

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D). - (FI) Mr President, it has been said here that democracy is a process, and these are wise words. Democracy is a path and not just an objective, because it is not perfect in any country.

One requirement for democracy is that nations also inspect the dark side of their history. Germany, for example, has done this, and has developed its own term for it: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past. In Russia, however, this has not been done. For example, when Russian youth are asked what their ideals are, a considerable number say that they idolise Stalin. In other words, if democracy is to develop in Russia, the people will need to look back at their murky history, and that will then result in a genuine appreciation of democracy and plurality.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I will vote in accordance with my group's instructions, but this does not prevent me from making a few comments that differ slightly from the position of my group.

Observers from our Parliament have confirmed that the Russian elections were properly carried out, with full guarantees regarding voters' freedom to vote and the confidentiality of their votes. Internet monitoring has also allowed remote monitoring.

President Putin is undoubtedly a strong, authoritative and established figure in Russian politics, but this does not automatically mean that there were voting irregularities. In this sense, I would like to point out that the opposition to Mr Putin also has the opportunity to hold street demonstrations. Parliament needs to take this into consideration and acknowledge an election result that has seen Mr Putin elected as President of Russia, like it or not.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Villy Søvndal, *on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.* – (DA) Mr President, first of all, I would like to thank you for all of the analyses, comments and proposals. It has been exciting to listen to the debate, and I will make sure that some of your views are passed on to Baroness Ashton, so that she can be inspired by them.

I would like to mention three points to conclude the debate. Firstly, I believe that everyone in the EU shares the disappointment over what has been referred to as the manipulations leading up to these elections, including in the form of a lack of approval of candidates, a lack of, and unequal, access to the media, and in relation to the instances of fraud that have been found, where the results of the elections themselves were manipulated. The EU has

also expressed its criticism of this, and it is important that we continue to express this criticism in order to get Russia to hold considerably freer and fairer elections. Russia has undertaken – in relation to the Council of Europe as well as in relation to recommendations by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – to hold free and fair elections. I would like to emphasise that if we are to move Russia from where it is now to where we want it to be, it will be by continuing the dialogue. We need more dialogue, not less, in order to enable the Russians to move to where we want them to be with regard to this issue.

At the same time – and this has also been discussed in the debate here today – we must appreciate the positive aspects of these elections. Firstly, President Medvedev promised to contact the Russian opposition. We believe that this represents an outstretched hand. We also have more international observers there than we have had before. It was previously extremely difficult to bring in observers – this time we succeeded. This also represents progress. Civic engagement in the elections in a number of areas indicates progress compared to previous elections. The large public demonstrations are probably, in reality, an expression of what we also know from other countries, namely, a vibrant democracy, where people also have the right and the opportunity to demonstrate.

This is a new situation, and it is one that we must utilise. We must use it to exert pressure for the economic and political modernisation of Russian society. We must use it to gain contact with all parts of Russian society. We must ensure that we instigate and continue to maintain contact with Russia in a large number of areas. Thus, I believe that we will achieve the most by continuing a dialogue because, as some speakers also pointed out today, there are a number of international contexts in which it is absolutely crucial that Russia is involved. One speaker mentioned Syria, but I could also mention Iran. I could mention the whole immense discussion concerning the forthcoming Rio+20 conference. Therefore, we need to bring Russia even closer to steadily increasing democratic rule. We must continue in our efforts to bring this about.

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

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow (Thursday, 15 March 2012).

Written statements (Rule 149)

Kārlis Šadurskis (PPE), in writing. – The large pro-democracy protests that we have witnessed during the past months in Moscow and other major cities prove that Russia is a changed country. Although Vladimir Putin was declared the ‘winner’ of elections, which were neither free nor fair, Russia’s young educated urban middle class is no longer willing to exchange economic prosperity for political freedom. They demand political reforms, rule of law and civil liberties. These people are Russia’s future. The European Parliament must support this Russian progressive movement by strongly condemning irregularities and violations in the preparation and conduct of the presidential elections and by demanding and closely observing implementation of political system reforms, announced by the outgoing President. Mr Putin’s authoritarian system took more than a decade to

(2) See Minutes

build and will not be dismantled overnight. But, in the end, Europe will see a modern, democratic Russia as its neighbour and trustworthy partner.

Indrek Tarand (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (ET) While I do understand the desire of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament to say something about the Russian elections, the text they have presented is of no assistance to the promotion of Russian democracy or even actually to social democracy itself. I do not understand the attachment of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe to the somewhat wishy-washy wording of the text. And I do not believe that Russian democrats Garry Kasparov and Mikhail Kasyanov, who are presently here in Strasbourg, would be proud and happy that the European Parliament has adopted a toothless text. In my opinion, the chair's conference decision to permit this resolution to be conceived at this very moment was a mistake. We can, however, perhaps correct this mistake by referring to more independent analyses and by having a candid and dignified dialogue with Russia, and not by attempting to please the highest ranks of the regime in the name of business deals. One such egregious example is the French decision to sell Russia Mistral-class offensive weaponry, which will then proudly sail around near the coastal waters of EU Member States. *Ceterum censeo* – the sale of the Mistrals is a fateful error!

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The criticisms made in this motion for a resolution of the results of the presidential elections in Russia merely demonstrate, once again, that the EU has double standards. It is a fact that, when there were suspicions of electoral fraud in the presidential elections of 1996, neither the EU nor the US refrained from praising Russian democracy and the election of the candidate who suited them: Boris Yeltsin. The Russian Government has been demonstrating a certain economic and political independence, as well as defending its national resources, particularly in terms of energy, and advocating the role of the state in certain strategic sectors. More recently, Russia's veto in the UN Security Council of military intervention in Syria meant that the US and the EU saw their expansionist aims blocked. The issue worrying the EU and the US, therefore, is not the defence of democracy, but their desire for Russia to have a government that better serves their interests. We would like the EU to pronounce on other issues too, such as the defence of strikers' rights, and of social and labour rights, but this is an issue that appears to be of little concern to the European Union.

14. Kazakhstan (debate)

President. - The next item on the agenda is the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on Kazakhstan.

Villy Søvndal, *President-in-Office of the Council, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Mr President, it is again a pleasure to deal with the latest developments on EU activities in Kazakhstan on behalf of Vice-President/High Representative Ashton.

Kazakhstan is a key player in the wider region of Central Asia and an influential actor in international forums. It has recently held the chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Since its independence 20 years ago, it has been the European Union's policy to support Kazakhstan's economic and political progress. The EU has a strategic interest to further

deepen our involvement with Kazakhstan and to fully develop mutual political cooperation potentials, especially considering the rapidly evolving regional integration dynamics.

Kazakhstan is a pragmatic partner, open to reform and willing to explore opportunities. The EU is also an important trade and investment partner for Kazakhstan. The recent start of negotiations on a new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan was a sign of the importance that the EU attaches to its cooperation with Kazakhstan. However, strengthening EU-Kazakhstan relations does not – and cannot – occur independently from the progress of political reforms in Kazakhstan.

The respect for common values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights are the basis for deepening our relations. This is a statement we jointly made with Kazakhstan in 2009, and we stand by it. Therefore, we maintain our position that the success of negotiations on the new agreement will be influenced by the advancement of political reforms and fulfilment of Kazakhstan's international commitments.

In this context, we are concerned about the recent developments and the overall slow progress of political reform in Kazakhstan, including the limited implementation of international commitments. According to independent observers from the OSCE, both the early presidential and early parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2012 fell short of meeting democratic principles.

For the first time since Kazakhstan's independence, we have seen considerable social tension, including a number of terrorist attacks. The strike of oil workers that started in May 2011 culminated in violent clashes with the police in December 2011, resulting in 17 dead and about 110 injured. To cope with evolving security challenges and threats, the Kazakh Government has amended a number of laws over the past few months. It has introduced changes that seem to empower the state more and more, while restricting the rights and freedoms of citizens, civil society and political opposition.

The Vice-President/High Representative received several questions from honourable Members of the Parliament about these developments and about the EU's approach, opinions and actions taken. She and her service are actively following the situation in Kazakhstan. Over the past 11 months, there have been more than 10 statements issued by Catherine Ashton herself, and by the EU, at the OSCE Permanent Council. On 17 December 2011, immediately after the violent clashes, the High Representative's spokesperson published a statement expressing concerns, calling for immediate investigation of the events and a peaceful solution to the situation of the striking oil workers.

The European External Action Service and the EU Delegation in Astana have maintained regular contacts with the authorities, calling on Kazakhstan to uphold its international obligations and commitments, in particular, regarding freedom of expression, freedom of association and assembly. The Prosecutor General's Office in Kazakhstan is carrying out an investigation, and the EU has requested that this process be thorough, transparent and not used to target any specific group or intimidate the Kazakh opposition.

On 2 February, the Vice-President/High Representative met with the Kazakh Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Kazykhanov, where she expressed her concerns and raised specifically the issue of the arrest of a number of opposition activists, including Mr Kozlov, leader of the Alga opposition movement and Mr Vinyavski, an independent journalist. As a follow-up, on 9 February, the EU Delegation in Astana carried out a *démarche*, asking for information on the health of Mr Kozlov and access to him for his wife and lawyer. As a result, the EU

Delegation visited Mr Kozlov in a military hospital in Almaty where he had undergone surgery. The EU Delegation was able to confirm that he had not been ill-treated and that his surgery was due to a previously existing health issue, which was not an urgent matter.

The EU's efforts and communication with the authorities, notably, the cases discussed in the regular human rights dialogue with Kazakhstan, also yielded results. The jailed human rights activist, Mr Zhovtis, was granted amnesty and released in February 2012. The trade union lawyer, Natalya Sokolova, who was sentenced to six years due to her role in the strikes, was also released, on 7 March, and her sentence was replaced by a three-year conditional sentence.

The EU has several times expressed its readiness to provide support to Kazakhstan for reforms and for the investigation of the events in December, as well as to address the underlying socio-economic problems that led to tensions in the country to begin with.

The EU is funding several projects that are already tackling issues that contribute directly to the improvement of the social, economic and political situation. These include projects on regional development, public service reform and modernisation, support for judicial and legal reform, for local governance and for civil society development, as well as several projects relating to democracy and human rights.

Promoting and supporting reforms in these areas, and further establishing relevant actors, are priorities both for civil society and the Kazakhstani authorities, at both central and regional levels.

We also expect that the perspective and negotiation process of the new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement will provide a stimulus for Kazakhstan to make more progress, notably in enhancing freedom of expression and freedom of association and encouraging real political pluralism.

To motivate progress, we foresee including fundamental political and economic reform commitments in the new agreement, including aligning regulations to EU norms and standards, and essential political clauses on human rights and the rule of law.

Kazakhstan's commitments to these fundamental principles will be a strong and clear expression of its will to step up political and economic reforms. WTO accession would also be a clear expression that the country is taking economic transition seriously and is ready to commit to multilateral rules and would show that Kazakhstan is willing to bring increased legal certainty to our relations. This is in the interest not only of Kazakhstan, but also of the EU and the wider international community.

This is, by no means, a simple process. We are only at the beginning of these important negotiations. However, we are determined to ensure that the European Union continues to stand alongside the Republic of Kazakhstan and its citizens, both as a friend and a partner, on the path of political reform and economic development. In this endeavour, we count on the support of the European Parliament and we look forward to the resolution that you will adopt tomorrow.

Paolo Bartolozzi, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank Mr Søvndal for his thorough description. First of all, I, too, would like to express our total support to the families of the victims of the serious clashes that took place on 16 December in Zhanaozen, and our concern for the subsequent unfolding of events. What was initially essentially a labour dispute degenerated into extremely serious

incidents in which 17 people lost their lives and, in the days following the incident, led to the arrest of journalists and representatives of the opposition.

It is in everyone's interest, as Kazakhstan has done, to shed full light on the events and I therefore hope that today will be remembered solely as an opportunity for our Parliament to explore what has happened thus far, and to reiterate our call for an investigation that will reassure the international community that the responsibilities for the events of Zhanaozen will be clarified and those responsible pursued in the utmost respect of the principles of the law and respect for human rights.

The delegation that I have the honour of heading has had the opportunity of hearing the explanations provided by the Kazakh authorities at some of its meetings, as well as those of some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are very active in monitoring events in the country. The willingness of the authorities of Kazakhstan to provide explanations and the promise to provide further clarifications are undoubtedly positive elements and should be appreciated by us all.

This is another reason why I would like to underline the need to maintain a certain balance, which I would have liked to have seen play a bigger part also in the text of the resolution on which we will have to vote tomorrow, and which, in my opinion, it would perhaps have been better to have postponed until the official investigations were over. It would also have been useful to send an official mission of international bodies to flank the investigations. The undeniable need to further clarify what happened and to call for greater efforts on the part of Kazakhstan in improving its progress along the road to democracy must also be accompanied at all times by a new commitment to an open and constructive dialogue with the country.

IN THE CHAIR: LÁSZLÓ SURJÁN

Vice-President

Liisa Jaakonsaari, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, I should like to thank Mr Søvndal for the analysis of the current situation in Kazakhstan. I agree with you that just now, Kazakhstan is very open and we must use this situation and use the leverage and power of the European Parliament to put pressure on Kazakhstan to enhance the human rights situation in Kazakhstan.

Unfortunately, since last year, we have witnessed not only an increase in civil protest and peaceful resistance, but also a decline in fundamental and human rights. This decline is the key word. It is not going better but it is in decline. We are concerned to see an increase in harassments, intimidation and detention of opposition leaders, of independent media persons and other civil actors. In a joint resolution, which I hope will be accepted tomorrow, we urge the Kazakh authorities to reverse the negative trend in human and fundamental rights and to understand that economic cooperation must go hand in hand with political cooperation and the improvement of human rights.

These are both very important – economic cooperation and human rights. That is why it is important for the Kazakh authorities to understand that we expect Kazakhstan to show some positive actions during the PCA negotiation. Therefore, a truly positive action Kazakhstan could take immediately is to fully implement its adopted national human rights action plan. In fact, Kazakhstan could be one of the happiest countries in Central Asia. Economically, it has become a wealthy country but socially and politically, however, it still

has to live up to its international commitments and to allow democratic involvement and participation of the citizens in social, political and labour issues.

Yes, we Europeans wish for Kazakhstan to become a true forerunner for such a 'spring' in central Asia and we need to use our leverage in the European Parliament.

Norica Nicolai, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (RO) Mr President, first of all, I would like to welcome the realistic manner in which the declaration made on behalf of Baroness Ashton addresses the situation in Kazakhstan. I also believe that not only Kazakhstan, but the whole of Central Asia, should represent a strategic partnership for the European Union, because we cannot speak only about human rights, but also about social rights, and this should be of particular concern to us.

I wish to welcome the start of negotiations for this partnership and cooperation agreement, because I never had the cynicism to simply criticise, and instead I understood, as a politician, the need to get involved in order to change things. In my opinion, this seems to be the way to follow in an active foreign policy action of the European Union. Under this agreement, the issues related to human rights must be a priority. However, we cannot fail to sanction the major deviations from democracy we are facing in Kazakhstan. I also welcome the release of Natalya Sokolova, but I request, in particular, the release of the opposition leader, Mr Kozlov, and of the leader of one of the most notable media authorities, the editor-in-chief, Igor Vinyavski. They are not the only leaders who are facing unjust and unfair trials at present, under a law aimed at national security in Kazakhstan.

I think the main signal that Kazakhstan's leaders want to democratise their country and ensure a future destined for its citizens lies in the way they address fundamental rights and freedoms. It is vital to re-examine that national security law because it is the source of these oppressions and this should not be tolerated. We cannot consider freedom of speech a violation of a law that concerns national security. No concept of national security in the world can violate the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, it is true that Kazakhstan is the most open country in Central Asia, economically speaking. European investments are welcome there and companies such as Total, Eni, Areva and Alstom have operations there with major interests. It is also true that Europe is hoping to use this country as a route to transport its troops and military equipment out of Afghanistan.

In view of its interests, Europe is remaining discreet and pragmatic towards the Kazakh authorities. However, are we not being too pragmatic at the risk of repeating the same mistakes we made with the Arab world? Moreover, that is what civil society in Kazakhstan, and in the former Soviet Union in general, is convinced that we are doing. We must therefore be attentive to what is actually happening in Kazakhstan. By freeing Ms Sokolova, the lawyer for the trade unionists, and Mr Zhovtis, the human rights defender, the Kazakh authorities are showing proof of goodwill. However, growing and continuing repression of the political opposition, the trade unionists and the independent media persists. Forty-three strikers in Zhanaozen are being threatened with long prison sentences, as are nine members of the opposition, Mr Kozlov, Mr Viniavski and Ms Amirova.

We have seen unbelievable censorship of the electronic media to silence all alternative sources of information. Following the orders of the presidential Security Council, 125 websites, judged to be dangerous, have already been blocked, with 168 others on a blacklist.

A series of recently promulgated laws tracks this regression in the human rights situation in Kazakhstan: laws on audio-visual material, the Internet and information and a law on religious communities.

Although the Kazakh authorities are telling us that they learned their lesson from the tragedy in Zhanaozen, they have just promulgated a law on national security which severely limits freedom of expression and the freedom to change the labour code, which restricts the rights of workers.

Are we going to, once again, content ourselves with verbal promises from the Kazakh authorities and continue with business as usual or are we going to openly say to our Kazakh partners that the repression of dissident voices cannot ensure long-term stability? The European Union will, in any case, have to commit to daily monitoring of the upcoming trials of the various strikers and opponents and ensure that the legislative reforms guarantee fundamental freedoms.

All of these developments should determine our position on upgrading the partnership with Kazakhstan.

Janusz Wojciechowski, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, Kazakhstan is the European Union's most important partner in Central Asia, although geographically, some areas in the west of the country are, in fact, part of Europe. Kazakhstan plays an important stabilising role in this strategic region of the world, and the Kazakh authorities attach great importance to relations with the European Union. We know that recently in Kazakhstan, violent events have taken place in which people have been killed. We would like to offer our condolences to the victims' families, and are of the opinion that explaining the circumstances of this tragedy is in the interests of all concerned and, in particular, of the Kazakh authorities.

We think, however, that we should be careful in our judgment of these events, since we do not know all the facts about what took place. The European Parliament's resolution must not turn into an indictment, particularly when it is not supported by evidence. I think we should appeal to the authorities in Kazakhstan to provide a full explanation of these tragic events, to punish those who are found to be guilty and to exonerate those who are innocent, but in this situation, we must not charge the Kazakh authorities and we must not take over their role. This is what the European Conservatives and Reformists Group proposes for the resolution, and I would like to ask for this to be adopted.

Paul Murphy, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – Mr President, what we see in Kazakhstan today is severe and large-scale regression in the field of human rights and democratic rights. However, this regression – seen, for example, in the brutal crackdown in Zhanaozen, which saw at least 17 people killed – did not prevent the German Government from signing a lucrative trade deal for rare earths this February. Here we have an example of fine words about human rights not matched by actions, particularly when it comes to vested economic interests.

So let us have some action here and ask the Vice-President/High Representative's representative to give a clear commitment that the negotiations on the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement will be suspended until there is meaningful change and until all political prisoners, including Vladimir Kozlov and human rights defender, Vadim Kuramshin, have been unconditionally released, and all trumped-up charges and investigations against the 43 strikers and their supporters awaiting trial – and the leaders

of the political opposition – have been dropped, including those against Ainur Kurmanov, leader of the Socialist movement in Kazakhstan, and the leader of the independent trade union ‘Zhanartu’, Esenbek Ukteshbaev. It is those who gave the order to shoot down peaceful protestors who should be in the dock, not these opposition activists.

I welcome Natalya Sokolova’s release from prison, but all charges against her must be dropped and there must be no restrictions on her trade union activity. The Kazakh Government is suggesting that they have learnt lessons, but actions speak much louder than words, and their actions suggest that the crackdown on workers’ rights and democratic rights is continuing and going even further. For example, February’s amendments to the labour code allow the dismissal of workers involved in strike action, makes it easier to dismiss trade union representatives during strike negotiations, and legalises lock-outs.

The report of the general prosecutor’s office has insufficiently accounted for the role of the state forces in the events in Zhanaozen, and the number of people who died according to that report is massively disputed by eyewitnesses. An independent, international inquiry is still desperately needed. If I am granted a visa, I will be travelling to Zhanaozen as part of a delegation of trade unionists, human rights activists and journalists to try and help bring out the truth.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Mr President, the government of Kazakhstan would like to deepen its relations with the European Union. The letter from the Kazakh Minister for Foreign Affairs to the High Representative early this week is proof of this.

En passant, the Kazakh authorities are flagrantly violating the fundamental right of religious freedom. Under the guise of a new, forcibly introduced act on religion, they have, since the autumn of 2011, been taking pride in forcibly dissolving as many as 570 of what they term religious organisations. That is hardly something to boast about.

Christian communities are under surveillance by the police and secret services and are also having to contend with anti-cult centres, set up by the government, whose job it is to mobilise public opinion against religion. Searches of the houses of defenceless Christian citizens, confiscation of their property, all without any legal grounds.

This is the murky backdrop to the compulsory re-registration of religious groups. Harassment of house churches, including huge fines for their leaders, completes the factors raising the spectre of religious persecution in Kazakhstan. That is the reality, Council and Commission. This clearly tells you that this is definitely not the right moment to strengthen our ties with Kazakhstan.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, the claims by the Kazakh Government that hooligans and foreign agitators were behind the violent incidents in connection with the demonstrations by oil workers remind us of similar statements by Syria. The government and the authorities there are never to blame.

It was probably on account of international pressure and the fear of country-wide strikes that Kazakhstan changed the sentence imposed on the lawyer who gave legal advice to the striking oil workers from a prison sentence to a suspended sentence. In this regard, we should not forget that the arrest itself should never have happened in the first place.

It is also important to remember the activists and oil workers who are still awaiting trial. The fact that police officers, who, according to video footage, killed fleeing striking workers

by shooting them in the back, can probably expect only mild punishments is also worthy of criticism. A full investigation of the incidents will probably only be possible by an independent international commission of inquiry. The only right and proper step can be to put an end to the violence against activists and to return to an open dialogue.

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

Janusz Wojciechowski (ECR), *Blue-card question.* – (PL) Mr President, I would like to ask Mr Mølzer if he is sure the comparison with the situation in Syria is a valid one. Thousands of people have been killed in Syria, there has been widespread bloodshed in Syria, and these are events which quite simply – in my opinion – do not bear comparison. Do you not think, Mr Mølzer, that it is not, in fact, accurate to compare the situation in Kazakhstan with what is happening in Syria?

Andreas Mølzer (NI), *Blue-card answer.* – (DE) I am sure you are right. Comparison with Syria is, in this regard, not entirely appropriate, of course, as the violence that exists in Syria has not occurred in Kazakhstan. What is certain, however, is that the rule of law in this regard does not exist in Kazakhstan, either.

Elisabeth Jeggle (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, the EU's interest in Central Asia has been growing for some time. Kazakhstan is our most important partner in the region, from both a political and an economic point of view. Since the start of the negotiations on an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which I very much welcome, and following the regrettable events in the Zhanaozen district and in connection with the parliamentary elections, we have now focused particular attention on Kazakhstan. I expressly support a close and open dialogue with Kazakhstan in order to enhance our relations. It is crucial that we pay tribute to Kazakhstan's positive development in the areas of democratisation, human rights and the rule of law, even if, from our Western point of view, these only represent small steps and we rightly expect more progress.

I am very pleased to see the willingness of the Kazakh authorities to deal with the events in Zhanaozen. In a mutual exchange, including with non-governmental organisations and representatives of Kazakh civil society, we were able to build up a comprehensive picture. The constructive dialogue between governmental and non-governmental representatives around a table in this way with us parliamentarians in Parliament was groundbreaking. The resolution should support this positive development. From this point of view, I think a postponement would also have been sensible, in order to wait and see what the investigations bring to light and so that we would then have clearer conditions for our position, which we do not really have at the moment. That is the position of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), and I stand by that, too.

Alexander Mirsky (S&D). - Mr President, we have to be more balanced regarding Kazakhstan; too many emotions and too few arguments in this resolution.

I call on everyone to face the truth and say that Kazakhstan is a political, economic and strategic partner of the European Union. The government of Kazakhstan is open to dialogue. Unfortunately, not so many people understand the inside situation in Kazakhstan. I propose before the resolution vote to organise a wide discussion on the whole and then to make a final solution. The truth is always in the middle.

Leonidas Donskis (ALDE) . – (LT) Mr President, I have to admit I am concerned by this tendency of nevertheless trying to replace real action with fine, polite and correct words when responding to a fundamental problem, and in Kazakhstan, we are facing a very

serious problem. The problem is the direction it took following the elections in May 2011 when Nursultan Nazarbayev became President again. For a long time, Kazakhstan had been very different to other countries in Central Asia: it was more tolerant and more secular than other countries in the region and ahead of them in terms of both its economic progress and its openness. Sadly, what we have witnessed lately are attacks on freedom of opinion and thought, politically motivated courts, many political prisoners, and the brutal shooting of demonstrating workers in the town of Zhanaozen.

I am therefore convinced that we cannot renege on such things as democracy, human rights and the very fact that these are non-negotiable just because here we are talking about an important and rich country with economic potential. I therefore want to add that the thing that shocked me was that, for instance, Vladimir Kozlov, the leader of the People's Party was arrested as soon as he returned from Strasbourg, after the plenary session during which he met me and my other colleagues. It seems to me that until these people are released, until they are no longer considered *incommunicado*, as they are currently, then there can be no talk of the government becoming more aware of what is going on or of some concessions that we would make. Either the political prisoners and dissidents are released or we have to issue a very severe warning and respond even more harshly.

Keith Taylor (Verts/ALE). - Mr President, as the standing rapporteur for (*sound disappears*), I am particularly concerned by the situation in Kazakhstan where, as we are hearing from many other speakers, fundamental rights continue to be violated.

I find it completely unacceptable that, following his recent meeting here in Strasbourg with MEPs to discuss the tragedy in Zhanaozen, Vladimir Kozlov, the leader of the opposition political party, Alga, was arrested by the Kazakh Committee of National Security on his return to the country. Mr Kozlov, as well as other political opponents of the government, was sentenced and put in prison.

More recently, I have also met with some Kazakh civil society activists, including Mrs Kozlov, and I was extremely concerned to hear that Mr Kozlov has recently undergone surgery while in prison but that his current state of health is not known. Nobody, including his wife, is allowed any contact with him. Journalists I have also met have been intimidated and threatened with arrest if they write anything against the regime in Kazakhstan.

So I think we should call on the Kazakh authorities to end the clampdown on the political opposition and independent media in the country and to immediately release all people incarcerated on politically motivated grounds.

Paweł Robert Kowal (ECR). - (*PL*) Mr President, our policy on Kazakhstan ought to be a realistic one, as it is in the case of other countries to the east of the Union. In my view, Kazakhstan is a country with which we can pursue a rational policy, on condition that the Union is consistent and remains true to its values. The borderline is always the same. If the people we know in Kazakhstan – our friends – are in prison, if force is being used, we cannot treat this situation as if it were normal. It seems to me, however, that Kazakhstan today needs to be given a chance, not just by the European Union, but in this case together with the United States. I have the impression that the Kazakh Government is still ready to accept such a proposal, but for this to happen, we need to speak in unison. The borderline we have set – where there are arrests and where force is used – is one we cannot cross. However, we can make an offer, the price of which is freedom for the media and preparations for free elections, elections which will one day take place in Kazakhstan, just as they do in any other country.

Miloslav Ransdorf (GUE/NGL). - (CS) Mr President, I travel to Kazakhstan quite often, and I can say that my impressions differ from those of Mr Murphy. The development of democracy is a long-term affair, requiring first of all the establishment of the rule of law as a foundation. The Kazakh leadership is striving for this, and on the basis of my discussions with Kazakh citizens, I can say that they value the fact that Kazakhstan is an oasis of stability and secular values in Central Asia. That is the first point. Secondly, I can say that even though this is undoubtedly a state where rather authoritative forms of governance prevail, Kazakhs nonetheless value their President, and this can be seen from the fact that they have now got a per capita GDP level of USD 9 000, compared to USD 400 in 1991 when Kazakhstan started out as an independent state. I think it will be some time before this country can be compared to European countries, or the EU, but I believe that they are on their way.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE), *Blue-card question.* - (PL) Mr President, Mr Ransdorf, I am full of admiration for your knowledge of Kazakhstan's economic performance, but I would like to ask if, in your opinion, these results and economic cooperation with Kazakhstan justify shutting our eyes to people being beaten and oppositionists being arrested.

Miloslav Ransdorf (GUE/NGL), *Blue-card answer.* - (CS) Mr President, I know about the recent incident, of course, and it must be left to the Kazakh authorities to investigate the whole affair. Even the people who were there now state that the Kazakh authorities are trying to achieve a certain level of openness, and to make available all possible information. I would like to repeat again, however, that democracy takes a long time to establish. In Latin American countries, for example, adoption of the principles of the US constitution by various newly established countries in the 19th century did not work because the conditions were not in place for such constitutional practice. We have to wait.

Piotr Borys (PPE). - (PL) Mr President, I am probably the only Member here who has been to Kazakhstan recently - two weeks ago, I had the opportunity to see the situation for myself. I met the victims' families and offered expressions of the deepest sympathy on behalf of the European Parliament. I met most of the prosecutors who are leading the investigation, and I met regional leaders, the new municipal authorities, independent non-governmental organisations and representatives of independent media. I would like to thank the Polish Embassy for this visit, but also the Kazakh Embassy, which made many of the meetings possible, and I would also like to thank the independent opposition for the meeting I had with them.

What lessons can be learned from this? Well, we have the assurance of the Kazakh authorities that they will explain the circumstances of the tragedy in which innocent people were killed, and also that they will explain the circumstances of the tragic beatings inflicted on people who have been arrested. We have their assurances that these investigations will be conducted. We also have assurances about transparent, objective trials for those who have been arrested, among whom we are most concerned about Mr Kozlov, Mr Vinyavskiy and Ms Amirova. This is very important. It seems to me that we should continue to monitor the situation concerning transparency. I would also like to say that I see this visit and this situation as a further step in democracy, but there is no democracy in Kazakhstan if truly objective trials are not given to those who have been arrested, and, in particular, to Mr Kozlov, Mr Vinyavskiy and Ms Amirova. I think Kazakhstan is taking a test of its democracy today. In my opinion, this democracy will be expressed by free media, by a free opposition and by a relaxation of certain restrictive laws which are in force today in Kazakhstan.

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

Miloslav Ransdorf (GUE/NGL), *Blue-card question.* – (CS) I would like to ask the honourable Member whether he knows about the activities of Mukhtar Ablyazov, which are connected with the activities of the Kazakh opposition?

Piotr Borys (PPE), *Blue-card answer.* – (PL) Mr President, Mr Ransdorf, this matter, and the person to whom you have referred, Mr Ransdorf, was not the subject of my visit. However, I would like to say that I did take a very strong interest in matters concerning people who have visited our Parliament – Mr Kozlov, and before that Mr Vinyavskiy – and I received a full assurance from the Kazakh authorities on the matter of transparent trials, and also about the possibility of monitoring. I think that what is most important for us is that having received these important assurances from the Kazakh authorities, the European Parliament should be in a position to monitor the investigations so that they will be fully objective. The assurances are a good thing; let us hope that what is actually transpires is good, too.

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

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen (Verts/ALE), *Blue-card question.* – (FR) Mr President, I would like to make the most of Mr Borys' knowledge about the country. Do you think, Mr Borys, that the chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has had a positive impact on the development of the situation? If so, what kind of impact?

Piotr Borys (PPE), *Blue-card answer.* – (PL) Mr President, Ms Kiil-Nielsen, I think that until this great tragedy took place in Zhanaozen, a tragedy for the entire Kazakh nation, these processes were moving in the right direction. However, the arrests of opposition members and journalists working for free media which were made following the events of Zhanaozen have given rise to serious doubts. Today, as a consequence, after meetings at the highest level with representatives of the regional and local authorities and prosecutors, I see a certain openness. However, I do think that today, we are going to have to test this information and the promises made by the authorities. In my opinion, the test of full democracy will be the trials of the people we are speaking about today, and I think it is in Kazakhstan's interest to provide an objective explanation of the situation, but it is also in Kazakhstan's interest to allow more space for the opposition and free media. We have to monitor this, and we have to show that democracy develops through certain stages and that in Kazakhstan, it needs to be extended further, along European lines.

Katarína Neveďalová (S&D). – (SK) Mr President, as a member of delegations to Central Asia, I have visited Kazakhstan several times, and I personally think that it is one of the most stable countries in the region and that, for us as the European Union, it is very important to have good contacts with it. I was concerned by the situation that occurred last December in Zhanaozen; as has been mentioned, it is an indication of the deterioration in human rights issues in this country, especially after the Kazakhstan's Presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

However, I believe that, thanks to its cooperation with the European Union, Kazakhstan realises that a transparent investigation into the events that took place will be very important, and that it will have to permit an international investigation into these events, since we are today discussing what happened, at the European Parliament level, which is unusual. I also think that Kazakhstan should not punish its citizens, for example, if they visit the European Parliament, as in the case of Mr Kozlov. I believe that the cases of other

people who are sitting in jail and are charged with various specific acts against the country will be fairly investigated, in cooperation with us and with the European Parliament.

Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE). - Mr President, of the former USSR countries, only the three Baltic States are consolidated democracies. Some others are struggling towards this and some others, like Belarus and Kazakhstan, are outright autocracies. President Nazarbayev now has to choose whether to remain a cruel dictator and to shed the blood of peaceful protestors, or to take his country towards openness and democratic values.

The massacre of oil workers in Zhanaozen on 16 December 2011, along with other cases, cannot go unnoticed by the EU. I expect the High Representative to refer these cases to the Council. While recalling ambassadors and setting sanctions on Belarus, the EU should not turn a blind eye to Nazarbayev's regime.

We need to be consistent in our policies and we must make it clear to our Kazakhstan partners that the talks on the new enhanced EU-Kazakhstan agreement require serious efforts to be made in that country to improve the human rights situation there.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE). - (SV) Mr President, Kazakhstan is undergoing a democratisation process, which is something that we should encourage. However, we should also be extremely clear when it comes to our expectations of Kazakhstan. Recent events in connection with the strike by oil workers, when 16 people were killed and members of the opposition imprisoned, demonstrate that we must insist on our values in our contact with Kazakhstan.

During 2010, Kazakhstan held the chairmanship of the OSCE. Membership of an organisation like the OSCE also carries obligations and it means that the common values and rules must be respected. Nevertheless, the OSCE reported that the parliamentary elections in January did not meet international election standards.

After everything that has happened since December 2011, it is clear that there is a need to build trust between the people in Kazakhstan. This will not be possible, however, if we do not investigate where the responsibility lies with regard to the strike, nor will it be possible if we do not ensure that there is respect for the principles of the rule of law, that legislation is implemented, that there is respect for international regulations and values and if we do not strengthen the position of non-governmental organisations in society. These are the things that we need to help Kazakhstan to do, and these are the things that Kazakhstan must undertake to comply with.

Kristian Vigenin (S&D). - Mr President, after months of peaceful social protest, on 16 December last year, oil industry workers were shot and killed by the police in the city of Zhanaozen in western Kazakhstan. Their legitimate demands for social justice and better lives were met with bullets. Not less worrying is the fact that, right after the parliamentary elections in January won by the ruling Nur Otan party with 80% of the votes, opposition leaders and journalists were detained. It seems that every effort was made to silence critical voices.

I am encouraged that some limited steps have already been taken in response to criticism: for example, the release of Natalya Sokolova last week, and of other activists who should not have been detained and convicted in the first place.

I recognise the important role of Kazakhstan as a partner of the EU in Central Asia, and for this reason, I insist that the country should show more progress in reforming its political system and respecting human rights and media freedom.

I welcome the readiness of the authorities to continue the dialogue with the EU on these issues, but we also have to be very clear. We expect much more from a country which made strong commitments before it took the chairmanship of the OSCE, did not implement many of those commitments during its term, and forgot about them afterwards.

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

Miloslav Ransdorf (GUE/NGL), *Blue-card question.* – (CS) I would like to ask Mr Vigenin to explain the fact that 142 buildings were burned and destroyed in the alleged workers' protests.

Kristian Vigenin (S&D), *Blue-card answer.* – Mr President, I would ask you also to try to give other Members the possibility of participating because obviously Mr Ransdorf is here to defend the Kazakh authorities. I think we need a bit more of a balanced presentation here.

Secondly, there is an investigation going on. I would not like to prejudge the results of that investigation. I am informed of many statements by the authorities and prosecutors, but what is clear is that peaceful protests were met with excessive force. That was recognised by the authorities. I believe that, once we have the results of the investigation, we can consider this matter thoroughly.

Metin Kazak (ALDE). – (BG) Mr President, Kazakhstan is a main partner of the European Union in the region of Central Asia. In June 2011, negotiations started with it on a new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. The country obviously has a long way to go until it achieves European standards of political pluralism, freedom of speech and assembly. However, Kazakhstan is still making efforts to gain recognition as a secular, constitutional and modern state.

This is a long-term process which the European Union must support. This is why I call on the Commission to develop a more strategic approach to human rights dialogue in Kazakhstan, to provide more active support to civil society representatives in the region, and to establish a properly functioning mechanism for coordinating the European Union's efforts as part of a structured dialogue on human rights and a bilateral dialogue between Member States and the republics of Central Asia, thereby also avoiding the political disagreements within the EU.

I firmly believe that this will also have a much more positive impact on the development of democracy in Kazakhstan than if it were left under the sphere of influence of Moscow or Beijing.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mr Søvndal, Commissioner, as they say in a well-known film: 'nobody's perfect'; and we in the European Union do, of course, face dilemmas and problems with countries where things happen which we should criticise, and which we do criticise, things which conflict with certain of the values and principles we adhere to in the Western world – in the European Union or the United States – and this, of course, applies today to Kazakhstan, too. Kazakhstan is a country with which, on the one hand, we want to cooperate – many of the EU's Member States want to cooperate with Kazakhstan and buy its natural resources. Kazakhstan is declaring an openness to working

with the EU's Member States and the Western world, and the President – who holds a great deal of power in Kazakhstan – is promising political changes. On the other hand, we see that things are not moving as quickly as we would like, things are moving with difficulty, and there are examples and situations which we see as fairly clear violations of human rights. So I think that in this situation today, we ought to say to the President of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh authorities that we are still open to working together but, at the same time, we are going to be very scrupulously monitoring cases which we consider to be violations of human rights, and we must tell the President of Kazakhstan that there can be no consent to persecution of the opposition, and that we do not agree to the repression of journalists and the silencing of free media.

Ana Gomes (S&D). – (PT) Mr President, the tragedy in Zhanaozen last 16 December raises concerns not only because of the number killed and injured by the violent repression, but also because of the difficulty in obtaining clear information about what really happened. The investigation initiated by President Nazarbayev will only be credible if it includes an international component to evaluate the facts independently and impartially, taking statements from all those involved, including demonstrators, relatives of the victims, reporters, police and civil society. The investigation must examine the responsibilities of the authorities, including the alleged torture of arrested demonstrators.

The confrontations in Zhanaozen arose from the growing wave of government oppression of the independent press, opposition political parties and civil society. The European Union has to remind the Kazakhstan authorities that the new cooperation agreement cannot progress without credible political reforms that make the democratic rule of law a reality in that country, regardless of the strategic importance of the economic and military interests at stake. The reforms must include the freeing of human rights campaigners and political prisoners, such as Vladimir Kozlov, who was detained after a visit to the European Parliament and whose wife is, at this moment, the target of threats and intimidation for attempting to defend the rights of her husband. He has to be freed as soon as possible and, at the very least, has to be allowed visits by his wife and the lawyers he has selected. The state of his health is a concern.

The European External Action Service must continue to monitor this and other cases, linking the negotiations on the future cooperation agreement to the freeing of political prisoners and effective progress with regard to press freedom, employment rights and other basic human rights such as the right to an independent judiciary.

Joachim Zeller (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, *Pomyśl, zanim pomyślisz!* – ‘consider before you form an opinion’ – that is what the Polish aphorist, Stanisław Jerzy Lec, demands, and it would also do us good to heed this recommendation sometimes here in Parliament. Only a few weeks after the resolution on a strategy for Central Asia was adopted here in this House, which sought to censure the states of Central Asia, we are now responding to events in connection with strikes in Zhanaozen in Kazakhstan without waiting for the outcome of the ongoing investigations that are being carried out with international involvement.

As regrettable as the deaths are and as much as those who were injured and imprisoned during the course of these events have the right to a review of what happened, the reasons behind these events remain unclear. Thus, Vladimir Kozlov, leader of the unregistered opposition party, Alga, stated that ‘it was a different group of people; the unrest was by no means in the interests of those who were striking, as it merely provided a reason for violence to be used against them’. The Central Asia expert, Arkady Dubnov, also said: ‘It cannot be

ruled out that elements of the Kazakh opposition who live abroad will also get involved. On the other hand, maintaining the tensions could be very much in the interest of someone in the Kazakh capital, Astana. After all, Kazakhstan's power elite are already fighting for the chance to become President Nursultan Nazarbayev's successor'.

We had the opportunity here in Parliament to speak with the Kazakh opposition in the presence of the Kazakh ambassador. The UN Special Representative stated today that he is impressed by the attention that the Kazakh Government is giving to the events in Zhanaozen and that it is necessary to uncover the true facts behind the unrest. We ought to take the Kazakh authorities at their word and measure them by their actions, but we should not make premature, reflex judgments.

Evgeni Kirilov (S&D). - Mr President, I agree with most colleagues who said that what happened in Zhanaozen, and the subsequent actions of the government, are truly alarming. We expect the authorities to conclude the ongoing investigation in an accurate and transparent manner. Transparency means including independent experts as well.

The democratisation of Kazakhstan is certainly a slow process. This is only the beginning for Kazakhstan, on the way to further democratisation and approximation with European values and standards, and equally in the field of human rights and the development of democratic standards. The country needs to invest considerable efforts and political will in this direction.

I hope that Kazakhstan will justify the expectations of its European partners, will heed the criticisms levelled today, and will try to take the necessary action. It has recently been invited to join the Venice Commission and is about to receive the status of 'Partner for Democracy' in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The citizens of Kazakhstan deserve better human rights standards, the rule of law and a democratic future – in other words, a much better future.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to see today's discussion in Parliament as an expression of concern for the future of Kazakhstan and as an expression of concern for the future of mutual relations between Kazakhstan and the European Union, because we know the role which Kazakhstan plays in this region of the world – in particular, the stabilising role during the conflict with Kyrgyzstan – and we also know the effects of its leadership of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. It is also a country of great economic opportunities, a partner in economic exchange with Europe. The recent huge contracts concerning the search for natural deposits in Kazakhstan should be mentioned here.

On the other hand, however, we also know it is a country whose recent elections have attracted criticism from the OSCE, which Kazakhstan was leading at the time, and here we are also concerned by the lack of full democracy and, in particular, the failure to respect the rights of the opposition, human rights and the rights of journalists. For many years, the opposition party Alga has not been able to achieve registration – why not? The party's leader visited the European Parliament, and when he returned, he was arrested. He has undergone an operation, and his wife is being denied contact with him. On the other hand, we also have reports of journalists who have been arrested. There is, in fact, a whole list of these activists – both public activists and opposition journalists – who are at this moment in prison. This is the basic standard we expect – freedom for opposition activists, and freedom for journalists – and when these things are achieved, they could then be a basis for a constructive dialogue.

Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D). – (EL) Mr President, the debate has started on improved relations with Kazakhstan. A new partnership agreement would certainly benefit both sides, given that Kazakhstan is an important partner in Central Asia and could become even more important.

However, progress in negotiations must go hand in hand with progress in political reforms in that country. It is vital that the necessary reforms be introduced in order to create an open and democratic society. Respect for fundamental rights is a non-negotiable value for the European Parliament and we shall continue to insist on that in every way possible.

Free and fair elections, the right to strike, independent information and trade unions are questions of strategic importance to Europe and the authorities in Kazakhstan need to understand that.

I should like to ask the High Representative to make it clear to the other side during the negotiations that there is no question of our making concessions on our values and principles.

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

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as I also believe that human rights are not negotiable, I wanted to ask Ms Koppa whether she will be among those opposing the agreement between the European Union and India until the Italian soldiers are freed and the rights of Indian citizens are respected?

Maria-Eleni Koppa (S&D), *Blue-card answer.* – (EL) Human rights are non-negotiable. It is a fact that we often apply double standards in the European Union. That is not right. We must persist in our fight to ensure that our relations with third countries can never be contested when examined from the point of view of human rights.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, the events of 16 December in Kazakhstan have greatly shocked many people, me included. My thoughts go out, first of all, to the families and friends of the victims. There is no excuse whatsoever for a government to allow a strike or protest to end in such a bloodbath.

What exactly happened on that day remains unclear, but what is important is that we find out the full truth. When the President of Kazakhstan said that he would launch a full inquiry, including the involvement of international experts, I thought: there is hope. However, to my regret, I must conclude that there has been no such international contribution whatsoever. I would therefore repeat the call that Parliament made in February for an international, independent investigation.

Mr President, when it comes to human rights in Kazakhstan, there is also a general negative trend. Other members have already spoken about this. For us Europeans, it is of the utmost importance that Kazakhstan develops into a stable democracy, a thriving partner in Central Asia. I therefore find it essential that, when negotiating a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, we draw attention to democracy, human rights and an independent and impartial judiciary. That will be of particular benefit, not only to Kazakhstan, but also to us.

Libor Rouček (S&D). – Mr President, let me sum up the discussion on behalf of the Socialists and Democrats.

Yes, we want strong political and economic relations with Kazakhstan. We want to increase our trade. Transport is important, as is energy, but for us, the area of human rights, civic rights, the rule of law and democracy is also important because, without that, no society can develop.

So we strongly condemn the violent crackdown by the police against the demonstrators in Zhanaozen and we demand an independent and credible investigation, with an international component of course.

But we also would like to see that these events do not happen in the future. What is important for us is to have a dialogue between the Kazakh authorities and civil society, to allow the workers, the employees, to have independent trade unions because, through this dialogue, through this cooperation, we can create stability which would profit the workers, the companies and society. In this way, society can develop, and develop in the direction of more human and civic rights and the rule of law, which is so important both for us and, I am also convinced, for the Kazakhs.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). - (RO) Mr President, the European Union and Kazakhstan can develop a true partnership based on political and economic cooperation for the benefit of both parties. The high frequency of meetings held last year and the start of negotiations for a new partnership and cooperation agreement prove this. However, for these relations to develop further, it is necessary that the Kazakh authorities honour their commitments in the area of democratic reforms and fundamental human rights. Several measures are essential in this regard.

Firstly, the irregularities reported by OSCE/ODIHR on the occasion of elections in January must be investigated. At the same time, further efforts are needed to ensure the rights of the opposition and the freedom of the media. In this context, I wish to welcome the recent release of Natalya Sokolova and to express my hope that it will be followed by other similar gestures. Last but not least, the violent events resulting in the loss of human lives, which took place in Zhanaozen in December 2011, must be elucidated. However, authorities have stated their decision to conduct a transparent and thorough investigation into these facts, within an investigation committee. We must encourage them to make all the necessary efforts in this regard.

I would have liked to ask the High Representative, had she been here, about her assessment of the regional role of Kazakhstan in relation to the other countries in Central Asia.

Jacek Protasiewicz (PPE). - (PL) Mr President, Mr Søvndal, Commissioner, opinions have been expressed in this debate concerning the need for a realistic policy towards Kazakhstan. I agree with this objective, although realism must not be allowed to mean acceptance for what was, unfortunately, a flagrant violation of human rights. Nowhere, and this includes Kazakhstan. At this point, I would like to welcome the decision of the Kazakh authorities which allowed Mr Kozlov to undergo an operation, and also for allowing him to be visited by his family and the EU Delegation. I also appreciate the fact that the draconian sentence handed down to Ms Sokolova has been changed. It is to be welcomed not only that she has been released from prison, but also that she has been allowed to continue her work as a lawyer. However, there are still too many other people being held in custody and awaiting trial. We insist that the authorities keep their word that these trials will be fair and just.

I would like to come back to the question of a realistic policy again. Of course, we are aware that high standards of democracy are not achieved in a very short space of time; they are not achieved in a flash. However, to ensure that this process moves forward in Kazakhstan at a reasonable pace, the authorities there have to know that future EU-Kazakh relations, including economic relations and the benefits the Kazakhs expect to receive from the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, also depend on how quickly improvements are introduced in the field of human rights and political reforms in Kazakhstan.

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Kazakh authorities have announced an international enquiry into the clashes of December, and therefore it is inexplicable why it has been decided to vote on a resolution in Parliament before the international bodies have had the chance to carry out their investigations and the courts have expressed a public verdict that will allow us to make a more objective assessment.

Those who have followed events in Kazakhstan in the last few years have had the opportunity to appreciate the steps taken to improve social dialogue, workers' rights, the independence of the judiciary and the development of democracy. We were therefore struck by the deaths in December and would like to express our sincere condolences to the victims and our hope that the facts will be established, the true facts. We are talking about a country where there are still a lot of open wounds left by the Soviet Union, and we are aware of the difficulties the government of Kazakhstan faces in governing such a vast area midway between the two worlds of Europe and Asia.

There is still a long way to go, but we believe that in this Parliament, there are some specific groups that intentionally ignore what is happening in our partner countries, such as China and India, where international law and the respect for market rules come second to their economic and electoral priorities, while we focus our criticisms on countries that are trying to make progress in developing democracy. Their progress may be slower than we would wish, but it must be helped and not hindered.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Herbert Dorfmann (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, there is no doubt that developments in Kazakhstan do not always go the way that we here in Europe would envisage. However, we should also consider where this country is coming from. Circumstances are not continuing to improve for the people in all of the countries in the region. Not all of them have freedom of religion or respect for minorities, for example. However, Kazakhstan has nevertheless achieved this, and that is also something we should remember.

We must not simply measure Kazakhstan by European standards, and we must take into account the situation in the region as a whole. Obviously, human rights violations must not simply be ignored, that goes without saying. However, I think this situation is not just black and white; there are also shades of grey, and we have experienced a good level of cooperation with the Kazakh authorities, the ambassador and the public prosecutor in recent weeks, including in the Central Asia Delegation.

We should simply help the Kazakh Government on its way to democratisation and demand this democratisation, and I think the partnership agreement that is to be negotiated is a good way to do that.

Richard Howitt (S&D). - Mr President, last year in Kazakhstan, I met and publicised the case of Evgeniy Zhovtis, a human rights defender, who was imprisoned on allegedly false

charges and released only last month. On 18 January 2012, I met opposition leader Vladimir Kozlov, who was arrested on his return to the country. This week, I met the wife of Kazakh journalist Igor Vinyavski, who is charged with seeking to overturn the constitution for simply organising a press conference.

Civil society representatives at the same meetings tell me that police claim they opened fire in self defence at Zhanaozen, yet the videos show that the protestors were running away. These meetings should end because the abuses must end. The release of Evgeniy and of Natalya Sokolova show that pressure does have some effect.

We restate that pressure today, and I call on the EU's delegation to attend and observe all the related cases in the court. We are watching and, if those who speak to us are targeted, we will speak out.

Charles Tannock (ECR). - Mr President, Kazakhstan is a geopolitically strategic country in Central Asia with large energy reserves. It is also a model of peaceful Christian/Muslim coexistence. It has recently offered a secure route to evacuate British ISAF troops as a substitute for the precarious Pakistani route. I have no illusions that this country is a Western-style democracy, but neither is it a repressive totalitarian state.

I sympathise, of course, with the tragic loss of life in December, and this must be fully investigated and any police who use disproportionate force must be brought to justice. I do feel, however, that there can be no doubt that there is a real risk of jihadi violence in this vast country, and we should support their fight against terrorism.

More reform is necessary in terms of media freedom, democracy and fundamental human rights, and this is incredibly important. But we must not drive Kazakhstan into the arms of Russia and China, who have little or no interest in human rights at all.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) Mr President, certain concerns could be sensed in the presentations of Mr Søvndal with regard to the political events that took place in Kazakhstan in December last year. The fact that the European Union is following political developments in the country is because Kazakhstan is an important state in the Central Asian region with considerable development potential, which is open to economic and political cooperation with the EU.

The events of December 2011 should, however, encourage us to monitor the political developments in the country more closely, so that we can better formulate our views in the talks on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement that is under preparation. The requirement of stronger commitments by Kazakhstan, adherence to human rights and religious and political freedoms, as well as structural and economic reforms, should therefore be an important part of negotiations on the new agreement with the European Union, and where there are problems in adhering to these commitments, we should be consistent in drawing the attention of our Kazakh friends to those problems.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Villy Søvndal, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (DA) Mr President, thank you for the debate, which I think was both helpful and useful, and which will also help us refine our policy. I would like to reiterate that Kazakhstan is an important partner for the EU for very many reasons. However, it is clear that we also have misgivings with regard to current developments and the slow progress of the political reforms.

I also believe it is necessary to emphasise that President Nazarbayev is well aware of what we stand for. It is precisely because he knows what we stand for that he has chosen to cooperate with us. This, in particular, gives us the opportunity to mention our concerns as well as how we can contribute to helping Kazakhstan develop in the way that we would like it to. We will obviously make it clear what we expect of Kazakhstan as a condition for the conclusion of a new trade agreement. It is very important for us to take this opportunity, in particular, to emphasise our clear expectations. This means that we are, of course, willing to cooperate with Kazakhstan in these matters. It means that the negotiations are an important tool for us, both to strengthen relations and to emphasise the need, and provide an incentive, for reforms, both economic and political, as well as reforms in the area of human rights in the broadest sense.

I will now answer the question of what role we see Kazakhstan playing in the region. It is clear that Kazakhstan can play a very important role in the whole of Central Asia. It did so in 2010 in connection with Kyrgyzstan and the unrest there. Thus, we consider Kazakhstan to be a country that will help to stabilise the situation in the region. We believe it is possible to establish even better regional cooperation in Central Asia, and that, in this context, Kazakhstan will play a very significant role, which is something to which we also want to contribute.

I will take away with me what I have heard in this debate. We must use our presence to develop democratic standards and an even stronger strategic partnership. We must also utilise the negotiations because it is these negotiations that will give us the opportunity to initiate a debate, including concerning the values that the EU stands for and that Kazakhstan is obviously familiar with, and that the country wishes to work with us to achieve. We also have an EU delegation in Astana that is providing practical assistance in all of these areas.

Thank you for the debate. I will relate on the content of the debate to Baroness Ashton next time I see her.

President. - I have received six motions for resolutions ⁽³⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 15 March 2012.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE), *in writing.* – (PL) To begin with, I would like to stress that one of the foundations of the way the EU functions is a democratic state, the rule of law and the standards and ideas associated with this which ought to guide us in establishing relations with countries that cooperate with the Union. In view of the geopolitical situation of Kazakhstan, a country which has had a difficult past, but which is trying to introduce precisely these principles, we should continue to stress the seriousness of the situation in Zhanaozen, but should also remember that Kazakhstan is the country with the most dynamically developing European standards in Central Asia. I would like to point out that Kazakhstan is, for us, a strategic partner, and that it is making every effort to develop our bilateral relations. Kazakhstan's successful chairmanship of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe has shown that it is able to rise to formidable

(3) See Minutes

challenges. I think that as we develop our relations and cooperation further we should take account of the specific nature of the region and the very complicated relationships with which we are dealing.

15. Situation in Nigeria (debate)

President. - The next item is the statement of the Vice-President of the European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the situation in Nigeria.

Villy Søvndal, *President-in-Office of the Council, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.* – Mr President, thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak on Nigeria on behalf of the High Representative. It is a pleasure to be here today to discuss this matter.

Nigeria is at a crucial juncture. President Jonathan's reform policy can shape Nigeria's future. Its democracy is consolidating and its economy is growing rapidly. Nigeria has the potential to become the biggest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa within a few years. It plays a major role on the African continent, it was a member of the Security Council last year and is a member of the Human Rights Commission this year. Former President Obasanjo recently led the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – African Union mission in Dakar to monitor the elections and this sent a strong message in support of democracy and people's rights.

I would like to thank the honourable Members for their interest in Nigeria for recent months. I say this with particular conviction because I had the pleasure of representing High Representative/Vice-President Ashton at the recent Ministerial meeting with Nigeria in Abuja on 8 February. It was a remarkable occasion and a very positive one.

Nigeria still faces crucial challenges: The European Union strongly condemns the recent attacks carried out by Boko Haram, with appalling loss of human lives. The Christmas bombings of churches and the recent suicide attack on a church in Jos on 26 February and again on 11 March are deeply shocking. So are all of the other attacks, including that in Kano some weeks ago. They should all be condemned.

Unfortunately, the number of attacks and human losses are increasing every day in an unacceptable spiral of violence. High Representative Ashton has repeatedly expressed her solidarity and sympathy with the victims, the injured and their families.

I also wish to make use of this opportunity to express our profound sadness at the loss of life of two European hostages in Nigeria on 8 March. We condemn in the strongest possible terms criminal actions such as the taking of hostages. Our heartfelt condolences go to their families for the irreplaceable loss they have faced. May they find strength in this difficult time.

The EU stands alongside the Nigerian authorities in their fight against terrorism, to protect all citizens, in particular, the most vulnerable, and to preserve the right to life and the rule of law.

The root causes of Boko Haram are many, but it is no coincidence that it is strongest in the north of the country, which has some of the worst socio-economic indicators in Africa. Nigeria's North-East Region is one of the world's forgotten emergencies: the grievances

there need to be addressed urgently, and we as partners and friends have promised the government to help them do so.

Boko Haram is targeting the secular democratic state, and Muslims and Christians. Nigeria remains a secular state with religious freedom firmly enshrined in its constitution. However, Boko Haram is trying to exploit the ethno-religious differences, which will always exist in a country as big and diverse as Nigeria. Nigeria's complex problems certainly have religious dimensions, but they cannot simply be blamed on religion. We have a well-established regular local human rights dialogue with Nigeria, during which all important issues, including freedom of religion or belief, are raised. The most recent such dialogue meeting took place in February this year. The EU is committed to supporting the government and people of Nigeria in ensuring religion is not misused to legitimise politically or criminally motivated violence.

I would like to add that the EU has been very active on the issue of freedom of religion or belief, especially during the last two years, as many countries – not only Nigeria – have experienced a surge of acts of religious hatred and violence.

We have used our full range of instruments, either bilaterally or in multilateral fora, in New York and Geneva, to be at the forefront of the fight against religious intolerance. We will continue to do so. EU delegations have been requested to follow closely the situation of their host countries and report on issues and actions taken. As required by the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers in February 2011, the overall action of the EU in this respect should be reviewed by the Foreign Affairs Council in the coming months.

There are, fortunately, some positive signs of Nigerians taking initiatives to ease the situation, such as the Association of Muslim Students, who exposed on Facebook the fallacies of Boko Haram. Important leaders of Islam in Nigeria have rejected Boko Haram as misguided and murderous fanatics. Nigeria's Catholic bishops have highlighted that the Boko Haram crisis has also brought the best out of many Nigerians such as Muslims and Christians protecting each other. The government is also making progress in developing and implementing a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, and several prominent Boko Haram members have been arrested. During my meetings with the Nigerian Government in February, I encouraged them to explore this counter-terrorism strategy further.

Nigeria matters to the wider world. It plays a big stabilising role in the region. It is the fourth largest oil exporter in the world and the second most important exporter of natural gas to the EU. Nigeria is firmly committed to the UN, is a major provider of UN peacekeepers and is vocal and robust in its support for democracies and freedom. Nigeria's positions in the recent Ivorian and Libyan crises speak for themselves. In short, I found a strong and open African partner, which, in many ways, shares our views and our values.

The Ministerial meeting resulted in several openings, which we should now explore further. One is the agreement on establishing a local dialogue on peace, security and stability, and other openings are Nigeria's interest in climate change and Rio+20.

It was interesting to hear from Nigeria's leaders how they see their economic development. They are diversifying to reduce their dependence on oil and gas, investing in infrastructure and agriculture, and focusing on job creation for their young and growing population of 160 million people. I heard many times that Nigeria strongly encourages European investment and participation in its strong growth.

On the other hand, Nigeria faces serious challenges, not least widespread poverty. Better governance, maintaining ethnic harmony and fighting corruption and crime are some of the big tasks it faces. Although Nigeria's human rights record has improved steadily in recent years, there are still areas where further improvement could be achieved.

The security situation in the Niger Delta, although improving, remains fragile. The region is vital for the national economy because of its oil production, so ensuring its peaceful development is essential. The EU is currently implementing a EUR 200 million programme to assist the development of the region.

Bricks, stones and words can be used to separate people, but they can also build bridges. Therefore, honourable Members, I call upon you to use your contacts with Nigerians to support and facilitate this absolutely essential bridge-building with Nigeria and I look forward to the resolution that the European Parliament will adopt tomorrow.

Mario Mauro, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (IT) Mr President, Minister, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you, Mr Søvndal, for your substantial and in-depth statement describing the situation in Nigeria, which contains some very meaningful comments. I would also like to publicly remind the Chamber about Franco Lamolinara and Chris McManus, who are not just two European citizens; they are two men, two people who loved that country very much and sacrificed their lives there. They should be considered on a par with all the Nigerian citizens who have lost their lives in recent months, the victims of a particularly fierce strategy.

This strategy is using God's name to implement its plans to achieve power, crippling the efforts of the government, the people, the institutions and the civil society of Nigeria to make this country a leader within the African continent. Therefore, Mr Søvndal, I say that the real problem of Nigeria is not ethnic or religious tension, but the fact that behind the ethnic and religious tension, there are interests and power strategies to achieve these interests, which have had such a negative impact in the last few months.

Despite this, we must be concerned, because having a clear view does not mean that we are in a position to avoid the risk of a civil war. This strategy is gaining the upper hand in many areas of the country: the strategy of the fundamentalist groups. While it is true that they are using religion in a distorted manner in order to achieve energy resource control, for example, at the same time, they are encountering a very weak response from the government which is coming across as particularly indecisive.

Therefore, I ask you to be particularly concerned with implementing the actions you have proposed, in which you will have the support of the whole Parliament.

Véronique De Keyser, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (FR) Mr President, it is true, Minister, that it is difficult for Nigeria to imagine such a contrast, a very explosive cocktail of tensions.

On the one hand, the population is living in poverty – which is still extreme – particularly in the north, while, on the other hand, there is an immense wealth of oil resources being exploited by companies that are polluting Nigerian waters without hesitation. There are also religious conflicts between the Islamic North and the Christian South, the presence of Boko Haram and therefore hard-line terrorism, which has led to the tragic deaths of two hostages. There is still political corruption. There are social troubles against the backdrop of poverty, but you have spoken, it is true, of the democracy that is beginning to emerge, of Nigerians taking charge of their own destiny.

In spite of everything, violence is still part of their daily lives. The paradox of all this is that we can clearly see the role that Nigeria plays – and you have described it well – at international level and at African level, particularly in Western Africa. It contributes, as you said, to promoting the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose headquarters are in Abuja. It has increased conflict resolution initiatives. In recent years, it has led mediation meetings in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. It is involved in many UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. It has even recently deployed an entirely female police force in Liberia.

On the subject of this Nigeria that we are talking about today in the resolution, with its clear and sombre face, we wanted nonetheless to condense the very specific requests that you have asked us to relay. We are asking them to demand that oil companies operate with transparency and respect for the environment and that they clean up the damage caused to the environment. Amnesty International has written entire reports on this issue. We have called for a law criminalising homosexuality to be abolished, then, and I say this with force – it is one of my group's priorities – for the imprisoned trade unionists to be released, and finally, for both a fairer distribution of wealth and religious tolerance to be guaranteed, since intolerance is still a breeding ground for terrorism.

IN THE CHAIR: OTHMAR KARAS

Vice-President

Marietje Schaake, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, last year, I was an election observer in Nigeria. The hope and anticipation among Nigerians was remarkable. They welcomed observers; anything that could ensure their vote would count and be counted transparently.

On the night before the first round, an explosion close to Abuja killed 25 people preparing for the elections – most of them youngsters, serving their year in the National Youth Service Corps, sons and daughters of Nigeria. Violent extremism kills indiscriminately and, combined with poverty, corruption and related problems, it does not take much imagination to picture how the extremists would achieve their goal to destabilise the country, to pit people of different religions against each other, and to recruit those without perspective.

Nigeria is home to one fifth of Africans. It is a leading nation in West Africa, for better or worse. Half of the population – 75 million people – are under 18 years of age. They will demand the opportunities they deserve. Many of the youngsters know more about the world than their parents did, through media and new media, including the fact that not everyone is poor and that it is not necessary to be poor in such a rich country. The young generation filmed the vote count of the elections on their cell phones and they will hold the authorities accountable. I would not be surprised at a Nigerian Spring one day.

We must invest in this young generation and do what we can to give them education and opportunities. An important prevention for being recruited by extremist networks is such independence economically. Nigeria is rich – I emphasise it again – in resources and in human capital. The EU stands ready to help to ensure more equal benefit from wealth and more equal distribution and good governance and to prevent and end the terrorism in a sustainable way.

Judith Sargentini, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Nigeria is a country with more than 150 million people and it is the largest oil producer in Africa. When things do not go well for Nigeria, then the whole region becomes unstable.

And things are not going that well for Nigeria at the moment. Although the country could be earning good money from its oil, more than half the population is living in poverty. What lies at the root of this is large-scale corruption. The oil dollars are disappearing into the pockets of a lucky few. The gap between rich and poor is increasing, and Nigeria is just one example of the many countries in Africa whose wealth of raw materials ought to be a blessing and, yet, it has become a curse.

Poverty makes people vulnerable to extremist ideas. Religious groups step into the gap left by the government. You can blame your poverty on someone else, someone adhering to the wrong faith. Another variation of that is blaming your poverty on the fact that you are not following the doctrine of your religion strictly enough. 'Join us in strictly adhering to doctrine'.

Communities in Nigeria are going after each other's blood in the name of their God. We might as well call this by its proper name. It is therefore best that we look for the real causes of poverty and see whether anything can be done about them. One of its causes is corruption. In any case, in the short term, the EU can do something to combat the corruption there by applying its Transparency Directive to oil and to mining, because if we publicly declare how much European companies are paying the Nigerian Government, then the Nigerians will also be made aware of that and then the money will not be disappearing into really deep, dark pockets.

I am therefore disappointed to see that Shell, the Netherlands' largest oil company and a major player in the Niger Delta, is putting pressure on the Dutch Government to try to kill off the Transparency Directive.

I ask my fellow Members and the European Commission not to allow this to happen.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, I last spoke on Nigeria in 2010 after the Jos massacres. Recent events, following repeated atrocities and kidnappings by the jihadi group Boko Haram, remind us that Nigeria sadly is a chronically unstable country.

By rights, Nigeria, as the most populated and oil-rich country in Sub-Saharan Africa, should be vying for a permanent seat with South Africa on the UN Security Council, but instead there are now concerns about a civil war between the Muslim-majority north and Christian-majority south, to which are added ethnic, cultural and economic tensions in Nigeria. The central government struggles against these factors and in fighting the still very widespread corruption in public life.

The added element of a secessionist insurgency from the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta makes the security situation particularly precarious in this country. The introduction of Sharia law in 12 states, in contradiction of the secular, federal constitution, also causes widespread fear amongst Christians in the north and there are increasing concerns about the long-term sustainability of Nigeria as a unitary state.

The recent brave attempts on 8 March by the British Special Boat Service to free the kidnapped Italian engineer, Franco Lamolinara, and British national, Christopher McManus, ended in the tragic death of both individuals and I extend on behalf of my group my deepest sympathies to the families of the deceased. Boko Haram and all those responsible should be held accountable for the murder of these two EU citizens.

President Goodluck Jonathan struggles to bring order and security to his country and is committed to fighting corruption and ending massive economic subsidies, such as to fuel, in order to restore free market economics to Nigeria's large economy.

We in the EU should give every support to his government. Any further escalation of violence will have massive repercussions in West Africa and result in large flows of refugees to Europe, particularly to my country, the United Kingdom.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, as we have seen, the persecutions and killings of Christians are continuing on a wide scale in Nigeria. The latest official data says that the Boko Haram armed group, which wants to convert the country to Islam, has killed 1 200 Christians in the last two years and forced 35 000 Christians to flee the country. However, in some Arab countries, too, like Egypt and Iraq, millions of Christians are discriminated against, even killed or forced into exile.

There is a sort of growing religious racism against Christians that is being accepted almost with resignation or fatalism. In this situation, the international institutions, including Europe, and important political and religious figures must make their voices heard loud and strong and call upon governments to face their responsibilities. I should add that I would also like to see the so-called moderate Islamic citizens, who quite rightly reject extremism, join us in defending the rights of their Christian fellow citizens.

To return to Nigeria, we have mentioned the widespread poverty, the high levels of poverty of so many millions of people in this extraordinarily rich country that could so easily provide amply for all its citizens. As Ms Sargentini says, there is a problem and that is corruption, which is so widespread and pervasive that it has altered the social structures of the country. With corruption, there is no respect for the environment, no free market, no opportunities for trade or young people, and therefore, ultimately, there is no democracy either.

In actual fact, Nigeria needs a proper, qualified, extremely honest ruling class, and without this, it cannot really be considered a modern country or a democratic country.

Ewald Stadler (NI). – (DE) Mr President, Mr Søvndal, ladies and gentlemen, it may well be that there are some specific examples of terrorism and violence in Nigeria. It has also long been known that Sharia is present in 12 states. For years, thousands of people have been dying in Nigeria. We are all aware of that, and for years nothing has been done about it. Overall, however, it is clear – and in this regard I would like to follow on from what Mr Provera was saying – that in many Muslim countries, which are allegedly experiencing a new Spring, there is substantial persecution of Christians. Whether it is in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria or Sudan, it is striking that more and more Christians are coming under pressure there, and we have no answer to this. Therefore, the European Union must have the courage to attempt to develop and justify a new offensive and defensive strategy and to allow this to influence policy. It is not enough simply to adopt this statement tomorrow. It may well be right – it is not wrong, and therefore I can support it – but it is not enough. Anything can be written on paper. The situation of the Christians in the countries listed is, unfortunately, not so easily dealt with, and the people there urgently need our help. Therefore – and this has nothing to do with religious conflicts – Europe must support these Christians, also in respect of the freedom of conscience and belief, and consider new strategies and new developments for ways in which it can better help these people and exert more pressure on the governments to actually assist these people.

Villy Søvndal, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (DA) Mr President, thank you for the debate. I think it has been a very interesting one. As I said, I have formed new impressions as a result of my visit to Nigeria, and I would like to communicate these further in relation to some of the things that have been said. After that, I will hand over the floor to the Commissioner, who will take over from there.

I would like to start by saying that there are some who have an interest in turning this into a religious conflict – a dramatic religious clash. That is what Boko Haram wants – namely, for this to become a huge religious conflict. I believe that we need to be very careful not to fall into its trap in a country where members of different religions sit together in the same government, a country where people marry people of different religions, where people of different religions live side by side, and a country that, of all places, is capable of avoiding a major religious clash. I believe that we should be very careful about playing the religious game. Having said that, this is actually a fight for the right of all religions to be practised, protected and taken care of. I believe that, in this debate, we must remember that the first to be killed if Boko Haram gets a hold will be the Muslim groups who are carrying out attacks up in the northern part of the country.

I also agree with those who deeply regretted the attacks by the same organisation on 8 March. We expressed our sincere condolences to the families of the victims. We condemn these acts as exactly what they are: criminal acts. It is a criminal act to kill other people, irrespective of what argument you use to justify it. I believe it is important to repeat that there is no argument on earth that gives people the right to take the lives of other people for the sake of a political issue. Therefore, those who do this must be brought to justice. They must be sentenced and put in prison. They must not be elevated to the status of martyrs for what they have done. Killing other people is purely and simply a crime.

I hope that some of you will have the chance to visit Nigeria's political leaders, both its President and a number of its ministers. I also hope that you will return with the same impression that I had, namely, that it is very rare to see an African country that has political leaders of such high moral strength and great competence. That is also what we need, because they are facing huge challenges in relation to the fact that this is a country with a very young population and a high level of illiteracy, a country that is, to a large degree, bound to oil as its only source of income, a country that has problems with terrorism up in the north and one that also has the prospect of doubling its population over the next 40 years. That is rather a tall order for a government if it also has the task of governing a poor country. That is precisely why it is so good that it has a government with such high moral standards as it has right now.

It is worth noting that even in this situation, with these odds, Nigeria is able to play its part as a stabilising factor in relation to the areas of West Africa, which, incidentally, have experienced very high economic growth in recent years. I also agree with all those who said that it is crucial for a country like Nigeria, which is not a poor country, to ensure a better distribution of wealth in order to benefit the many and to combat corruption. That is what they are trying to do, but the people leading the fight against corruption do not stay very long in the job – as it is a relatively dangerous job! With these comments, I wish you well for the continuation of the debate. We need the European Parliament to keep an eye on what is happening in this country, which may perhaps end up being the world's third largest country in terms of population size over the course of the next 40 years.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE). - (NL) Mr President, there has recently been an unbelievable increase in the number of attacks carried out by the radical Islamist group, Boko Haram. Hundreds of people have been killed.

Boko Haram is using religion to destabilise Nigeria. The socio-economic inequality there, the poverty, the high levels of unemployment, the corruption and the lack of prospects, especially for young people, are providing fertile ground for extremism. I believe – as other members have already said – that we, as the European Union, should not only strongly condemn the violence, but also do everything in our power to support Nigeria. The most important thing in this regard is that we, as the international community, also find out the underlying causes as to why people in Nigeria, a country so rich in resources, are not actually able to become rich themselves.

That means that we also have to do everything to encourage cooperation in the region. We, as the EU, should contribute to that process. I understand that the Dutch Foreign Minister last week asked that Boko Haram be added to the list of terrorist organisations. I wonder whether that has actually happened, and if not, when it is going to happen.

Ricardo Cortés Lastra (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, I must start my speech by condemning the violence that has been taking place in Nigeria over the last few months. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the one that has the best prospects for economic growth and for attracting foreign investment. Its position as an oil-exporting nation allows it to acquire substantial resources, which should be used in the vital task of fighting the poverty and inequality that blight the country.

Commissioner, as we in the Committee on Development have maintained on many occasions, human rights, democracy and development have a synergistic relationship of mutual reinforcement. At the root of the conflict in which Nigeria is embroiled lies the absolute poverty in which a large proportion of the population lives. The nation's wealth is not being redistributed amongst the lowest levels of the population, and this is making millions of Nigerians vulnerable, with no access to the most basic services.

The European Union, by way of its cooperation and development policies, can make a real difference in this country. We must focus our common strategy on the fight against poverty through the provision of basic services, such as health and education, for the most vulnerable. The value added by the European Union in this country should, without doubt, be to achieve a reduction in inequality and to turn the growth that the country is experiencing into increasingly fewer people living in extreme poverty.

We should be wary, however, because we now know better than ever before that our cooperation policy will not be enough. We have to strive for consistency in the European Union's other policies vis-à-vis Nigeria. I also want to stress the importance of transparency and responsibility amongst European companies operating in the country.

I would like to conclude, Commissioner, by mentioning a very serious risk that threatens Nigeria and the whole region of West Africa and the Sahel. The very prolonged drought, poor harvests, lack of livestock, and the rise, once again, in the price of food are now hinting that a famine in the region is imminent. United Nations agencies and civil society organisations are already declaring famine. We must react in time and deal with this famine before it claims more victims in this region.

Charles Goerens (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, at the risk of being unoriginal, allow me to say that the violence and, indeed, the barbarianism that is unfortunately commonplace

in Nigeria, have found a very fertile breeding ground for their development there. Nigeria is still incapable of fulfilling its sovereign functions, including, in particular, the protection of its citizens. Its authority is regularly undermined by factions acting either in the name of Islamic fundamentalism or violence against religious and ethnic minorities.

However, we must also remember that Nigeria is not a state that is lacking in resources. These resources, particularly in terms of oil, do little, if anything, to alleviate the needs of the population. The measures approved by the Commission to remedy the instability in the Niger Delta, to work towards improving governance, to provide support for anti-corruption measures and so on, are, of course, relevant and useful, but responsibility lies, first and foremost, with the Nigerian authorities.

Jean Lambert (Verts/ALE). - Mr President, I very much welcome the opportunity, at long last, to have a debate on Nigeria. It is a major country, as we have heard, which is extremely important in the region and potentially internationally. I very much regret that the only way we seem to be able to discuss events in Nigeria is via yet another resolution which has taken religion as its focus.

I want to respond to some of what has been said today. Let us be clear here that, while Boko Haram is the major force behind the violence, they are not killing only Christians. Muslims have died too. They have also assassinated Muslims who do not agree with them. However, there have also been Muslim deaths where Christians – or so-called Christians – have retaliated. We have also seen these events being condemned by political and faith leaders from a variety of different perspectives.

It is very important to remember what has been said about what links this country, and not just what divides it. Yes, corruption is an issue. There is more that we could be doing. I, for one, very much welcome the recent trial in British courts of Ibori, a former governor of Delta State, which put him in jail. There is more that our own countries can do to deal with corruption.

The people of Nigeria want a government that is fit for purpose. That is why, as we have heard, they were willing to stand for hours in the sun waiting to vote. However, I believe that the European Union, too, needs to change its relationship with Nigeria and that this Parliament should be strengthening its relationships with the Nigerian Parliament.

Bastiaan Belder (EFD). - (NL) Mr President, the Islamist terrorist organisation, Boko Haram, has an iron hold over Northern Nigeria. This is a depressing situation, one in which Christians would rather take their own steps to protect their churches and religious communities than rely on the police or the army. This is what I heard from a local observer this very morning.

The unbridled violence of Boko Haram and its Islamist followers is causing a huge amount of tension within the large Christian minority in Northern Nigeria. For Biblical reasons, the older generation wants to restrain young people from taking reprisals against their fellow Muslim citizens, many of whom have also become victims of Boko Haram, and, more than anything else, wants to exercise conciliationism.

This is a powerful spiritual struggle which deserves impartial government support. That brings me to the core problem which has been mentioned in the resolution, too. To what extent has Boko Haram infiltrated the Nigerian state apparatus?

I have two questions on this that I would like to put to the High Representative or her substitute. I will give them to the Commissioner now and I hope I will be able to put them to Baroness Ashton next week when she visits the meeting of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. What views does Baroness Ashton or the Council have on this? To what extent has high-level infiltration taken place in Nigeria?

My second question, which is based on reports, is: to what extent is Boko Haram operating closer to Europe: for example, in large Nigerian communities in the United Kingdom? The answers to these questions could be extremely important for many things, including deciding what position Europe should take.

Diane Dodds (NI). - Mr President, coming from Northern Ireland, I know only too well the fear and the pain the Nigerian people are suffering as the result of the wanton violence of terrorist groups who kill others because of their religion. The broad Christian population of Nigeria is living in fear. Suicide bombers have targeted places of worship. In late February, in the city of Jos, three people died as a bomb was driven into a church in but one of the latest attacks.

The terrorists gave this chilling warning: we attacked simply because it is a church, and we can decide to attack any church. We have just started. It seems that the militant Islamists of Boko Haram desire to rid Nigeria of its Christian population. Of course, I accept the point made by others in this House that others apart from Christians have suffered and died, and I want to make it clear that I condemn all these attacks.

Losing your life because of your religion is not acceptable. We in this House should call it for what it is. It is not simply all about poverty or corruption, but it is about attacking a particular section of society.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). - (PL) Mr President, Mr Piebalgs, ladies and gentlemen, in 2010, the European Parliament adopted a resolution condemning mass atrocities in the region of Jos, where, at the time, a large number of Christians had been massacred. Today, unfortunately, we have to say that the situation in Nigeria has deteriorated. While it is true that freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Nigerian constitution, the authorities in Nigeria are too weak to fight organised crime, which does not accept the idea of freedom.

The organisation Boko Haram, which is terrorising the Christian community and is fighting for the introduction of Sharia law in all of Nigeria's states, is resorting to bombings, in which over 1 000 people have now died. A week ago, two hostages died at the hands of the same group: a British and an Italian citizen, who had been held captive for 10 months.

Two years ago, the European Parliament was in doubt as to whether the main motivation for the outrages in Nigeria was religion. The experts were of the opinion that the roots of the violence in Nigeria were very complicated: economic, social, ethnic, political. However, today it seems obvious that the basic cause of the violence is religious hatred. The name 'Boko Haram' can be translated as 'western education is sinful', and a command to fight sin and immorality is, by its very nature, a religious command. The conclusion is that we must support those in Nigeria who are trying to oppose the religious fanatics.

Thijs Berman (S&D). - (NL) Mr President, we are all concerned about the reports coming out of Nigeria: the attacks of 20 January in Kano, in which more than 150 people were killed, the kidnappings, the failed rescue operations and the tragic events of last weekend, in which a suicide attack on a church with at least three fatalities led to an act of revenge claiming the lives of ten people.

These explosive tensions between different communities demonstrate the powerlessness of the Nigerian Government. If stability is to be created, there will have to be dialogue between the religious groups and between the regions, but, above all, the rule of law must function so that these crimes do not go unpunished.

Nigeria's vast resources ought to have brought the country huge wealth, but the opposite has been the case. The oil appears to have brought nothing but problems, such as environmental pollution and the kidnapping of foreigners, and the profits have all been siphoned off to richer countries. But we, the European Union and its citizens, can play an important role in the stabilisation of Nigeria. If the profits from oil extraction did not all go to large international companies, like Shell, then the local population would also be able to benefit from this lucrative source of income. And if these large international companies were to duly pay their tax, then the government could become stronger.

For that reason, we urgently need the Transparency Directive to come into being, as my fellow Member, Judith Sargentini, just said. Fairly distributed wealth is a guarantee of stability. In the new plans for the Union's external policy, principles, such as democracy and rule of law, peace and security, occupy an important place. How the European Union, and the High Representative in particular, assists Nigeria with the current developments will make it clear, in practice, how much store we set by these principles.

Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the many misadventures of Nigeria include the deaths of Franco Lamolinara and Chris McManus, two European citizens who were killed during the failed attempt to free them. This was a very sad episode not only because of their deaths, but also because of the way the operation was coordinated between the countries involved, and for the apparent absence of any European involvement dear Commissioner.

Italy has complained about the lack of information about what was about to happen – and this is already one issue – but I must say to the Commissioner that the citizens of Europe need a visible face of our shared foreign policy that is able to face its responsibilities on behalf of Member States, especially where there is little coordination, as was the case in Nigeria.

Today, many people are licking their wounds, the Italians who were unable to be part of the liberation plan, the British for a failed operation and Europe for having kept a low profile. We condemn terrorism, which is also a phenomenon totally alien to African culture, and call on Nigeria to do its utmost, but we must also learn what the EU's responsibilities are, and quickly, if we want to be taken seriously by Europe's citizens.

Barbara Lochbihler (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, the cruel violence of the organisation Boko Haram has already been mentioned by several fellow Members. It is appalling and, with its brutality, it is repeatedly gaining the attention of the world's media. I would like to recall in this regard that there have also been extreme acts of violence in Nigeria in the past.

In July 2009, more than 700 people were killed, and in January 2010, in the state of Plateau, more than 300 people were killed and more than 10 000 displaced in connection with religious and ethnically motivated violence. In both cases, the government set up a commission of inquiry, which carried out an investigation and drew up a report. However, these investigation reports were not published and those responsible were not named in either 2009 or 2010, nor prior to that in 2008.

These are serious failures, and therefore I would like to emphasise the call in our resolution for there to be independent investigations of these human rights violations, and for the perpetrators to then be given a fair trial, and this should include the perpetrators on all sides of the conflict. That is what I would like to call for.

Zbigniew Ziobro (EFD). – (PL) Mr President, as we look on, horrific tragedies, deaths, and the murders of innocent people are taking place in Nigeria – innocent people who have become the victims of religious madness. Islamist extremists are attacking Christians and murdering them only because the Christians belong to a different religion and have a different culture, tradition and values. It is horrific that tragedies of this kind are taking place on such a large scale in today's world.

In fact, the first clashes between Muslims and Christians were noted as long ago as 1990 and, at the time, the international community unfortunately was not very consistent in its attitude. The effects of this passivity were in evidence last Sunday, for example, when Boko Haram terrorists placed bombs outside a church in Jos, murdering another 14 innocent people.

Today, the European Parliament must issue an unequivocal condemnation of Islamist terrorism and the attacks on Christians. Members should enlist the help of experts to draft a plan for extending support to the authorities in Nigeria in the fight to stop the bloodshed and reunite the country. There is no doubt that this is something which is missing today – strong condemnation of Islamist radicalism and its crimes.

Gay Mitchell (PPE). – Mr President, the actions of the Boko Haram group are outrageous and fanatical acts of hatred for which there must be a commitment to judicial accountability. I would urge the High Representative to put in place now arrangements to ensure that they know that they will be called to account.

This group has been waging an insurgency against Nigeria's Government since 2009 and has been blamed for hundreds of killings and gun and bomb attacks. In the past six months, they have widened their targets beyond the police and other authority figures to include Christian worshippers. They have bombed churches in the cities of Jos and killed 185 people as we have heard.

In any society, this is totally unacceptable. But I also want to raise the fact that Nigeria is the world's eighth largest oil producer and yet the majority of its 145 million inhabitants live below the poverty line.

I believe this is something that the High Commission should be raising not just with the Nigerian Government but also with the producers and the developers of these oil products. We must go after those who are pursuing these heinous crimes but also try to bring some influence to bear on the oil producers at the same time.

Corina Crețu (S&D). – (RO) Mr President, what is happening in Nigeria, the instability, the violence, the extremism, and now the killing of two Western citizens, is a strong twofold warning: as regards communication between European Union countries and the spread of religious violence on the African continent. I believe that we need to become more aware of this region, where terrorist groups coordinated by al-Qaeda are operating.

A more serious concern for Nigeria as a whole is also required. In Africa's most populated country, 80% of its 170 million inhabitants are struggling in misery and poverty, although the country itself is not poor. Nigeria is the ninth largest oil exporter in the world but, at

the same time, it is one of the most corrupt and poorly positioned countries in the UN human development index classification. Therefore, I think that we need to go beyond the minimal stage of monitoring elections in African countries, otherwise, poor governance, poverty and corruption will continue to fuel instability and violence.

Alojz Peterle (PPE). – (SL) Mr President, during the election last year, I had the opportunity to gain in-depth knowledge of Nigeria, which I consider one of the European Union's key partners.

I regret that the elections have led to acts of violence, which are destabilising the country, in particular, the spread of terrorism and intolerance towards Christians. I firmly believe that the relationship between Christians and Muslims is not a key internal political issue for Nigeria and I know the vast majority of both groups want peaceful, democratic and lasting development for Nigeria, while fully respecting internal diversity.

Three things, above all, are needed for the peaceful and stable future of Nigeria: improvement of the quality of governance in the spirit of social justice, respect for different identities and balanced development of the country. It is essential that the sources of the conflict's growth are systematically and dynamically tackled. Working together, we need to prevent terrorism and the violent enforcement of political will.

I propose that in keeping with this spirit, the European Union strengthens cooperation with Nigeria and that we develop further the parliamentary dimension of political cooperation.

In finishing, allow me to welcome His Excellency the Ambassador of Nigeria, Mr Baraya, who is attending our debate.

Michèle Striffler (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Parliament must strongly condemn the recent violence in Nigeria, particularly the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Islamist sect, Boko Haram. Extreme poverty, endemic corruption and poor governance have created a breeding ground for extremist groups that enables them to easily recruit young unemployed Nigerians.

The Nigerian Government must take effective measures without delay in order to protect its citizens and put an end to widespread corruption and impunity, and the European Union must help the government in its efforts. I also believe that we must avoid putting forward vague and simplistic explanations for the conflict based on religion alone. Instead, we must attack the root causes of the tensions in Nigeria, which are also economic and social.

Nigeria is the biggest producer of crude oil in Africa but this wealth is, unfortunately, very poorly managed. Furthermore, the Nigerian authorities, but also the multinational oil companies, must quickly put an end to the current pollution and deal with the damage to the environment caused by oil pollution, which is particularly harmful for the local population.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, for several months now, the news coming from Nigeria has been worrying. The actions of the terrorist group Boko Haram have become more and more violent. Thus, in November 2011, 65 people died in a series of bombings in Damaturu; on Christmas day, 44 people were killed in the attack committed in front of Sainte-Thérèse church of Abuja. The Friday evening bombings in Kano, in the

north of the country, which led to the death of at least 185 people, are so far one of the most barbaric acts claimed by Boko Haram.

On the other hand, it is known that Nigeria has been for decades the scene of clashes between Christians and Muslims. However, the aggravation of the security situation is now manifest and I think it can no longer be ignored. The actions of the Boko Haram group are threatening the stability of the whole country and many are wondering whether, at the moment, Nigeria is about to disappear. Therefore, our support is more than ever necessary to establish a climate of tolerance and respect for the freedom of religion in Nigeria.

Finally, I would like to conclude by drawing attention to paragraph 7 of our common resolution: Boko Haram is threatening not only Nigeria, but the entire region, because of potential connections with AQMI. Therefore, we must encourage regional efforts aimed at preventing synergies between Boko Haram and AQMI.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the religious and ethnic violence in Nigeria has claimed thousands of victims over the past 10 years. Since 2009, we have been seeing a marked escalation in connection with the activity of the extreme Islamist sect which has been mentioned here many times. Since July 2009, it has been behind 160 bomb attacks against Christians in which over 900 people have been killed, including 44 last Christmas. The group aims to introduce Sharia law in all of Nigeria's 36 states. It has launched a religious war against Christians and is threatening to drive them out of the north of the country, which makes Christians a very heavily persecuted religious group. In the Middle East, there is already the risk that Christian communities will disappear, and this may translate into a wave of migration to Europe.

The situation in Nigeria is one of political instability and corruption, factors which have led to an extremely uneven distribution of wealth. Nigeria has the second highest GDP in Africa and is an important supplier of crude oil to Europe, but a huge proportion of its population are trapped in poverty and have barely USD 2 a day on which to live. This provides the basis for the growth of religious fanaticism. The European Union should be striving to strengthen dialogue with the Nigerian Government, to bring it to put robust measures in place which will guarantee public order and justice.

Alf Svensson (PPE). – (SV) Mr President, in his brief closing statement, the Danish minister stated that Nigeria has capable political leaders. That may be the case, but it is nevertheless deplorable that an oil-rich country like Nigeria should be so thoroughly corrupt and that poverty should be so marked for a large number of people in a wealthy oil-rich country such as Nigeria.

The debate here has highlighted the situation between Muslims and Christians. No one can deny that this is devastating and horrifying. It is currently the case that the EU is providing several million euro over a five-year period – almost EUR 680 million. It is clear that, in connection with this donation of aid, we expect resolute demands to be made – and I am convinced that the Commissioner is also making these demands – in respect of human rights and freedoms. I believe that we specifically need to emphasise freedom of religion, in particular, because the concept of human rights and freedoms can be seen as rather 'limitless'. In Nigeria, but not only in Nigeria, it is about freedom of religion in particular. It is not only the group that has been mentioned here several times that we can turn to; we can approach the government itself. We must not be satisfied with simply expressing our opposition, as has been said here; we must also make demands. We know that Nigeria has a large population and it plays, and wants to play, a major role in Africa.

That is something that this country certainly can do, but something more is required of its own government.

Peter Šťastný (PPE). - Mr President, we all condemn the terrorist attacks conducted by the Nigerian Islamic sect, Boko Haram, on civilian – predominantly Christian – targets. The two attacks in December and January left Nigeria with over 200 dead and increasing tensions between the Christian south and Muslim north. Such tensions inside a country prevent the implementation of much-needed structural reforms. They also halt the long-term efforts of the EU to achieve economic, financial, social and political developments, and they destabilise the whole region because of Nigeria's importance and status in it.

Solutions are not simple, and we have to realise that ethnic and religious conflicts are deeply rooted in Nigeria's history. The government must address the long-term causes of these religious tensions, such as under-development, poverty, unemployment, corruption, access to drinking water, etc. The EU is helping in all these issues, but we must exert more pressure on the government to enforce the rule of law and severely punish the perpetrators of these crimes.

Regional development and the strong rule of law will be able to prevent the radical groups from operating. It is the stability, security and development programmes that turn people away from radicalism, ethnic and religious hatred.

Sari Essayah (PPE). - *(FI)* Mr President, Nigeria is the only country in the world where there are as many Muslims as Christians. Among its greatest political challenges today are to keep the country united and to fight terrorism.

In recent months, the extremist Islamic Boko Haram movement has carried out violent bomb attacks on civilians, government buildings and churches. The attack on a church during Christmas Mass was an inconceivably brutal act of terror. The purpose of these violent attacks against Christians is to put a strain on relations between Muslims and Christians and to make the current Nigerian leadership look incapable of maintaining the country's unity and security. Muhammadu Buhari, the Muslim military leader in the north, has made an impressive display of criticising the efforts by President Goodluck Jonathan's government to improve security as ineffectual.

Conditions are now ripe for the religious fanatics in the country. It is easy to persuade the enormous numbers of young, unemployed, excluded people in northern Nigeria to be involved in violent, extremist Islamic activity against Christians and, furthermore, western values. Boko Haram is also thought to have links with al-Qaeda. The security situation is also being affected by combatants returning home unemployed from North Africa, Mauritania, Chad and Libya and by illegal weapons flowing out of that region. Nigeria's leaders now need support in their struggle against terrorism and to stabilise conditions in the country.

Elmar Brok (PPE). - *(DE)* Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we need to look at two things together in this regard. The first is the situation in Nigeria, a country that is involved with the ACP and with which we have good relations. Commissioner, you know better than I do how help is actually being provided here, and that we need to bear in mind that the government does, in actual, fact have a rich country on account of the deposits of raw materials, which, as Mr Šťastný said, should, in fact, be used to provide better social and living conditions.

Secondly, we need to realise that Boko Haram puts forward arguments and acts in the same way as other Islamic groups and states do in their persecution of Christians. Seventy-five per cent of all instances of the persecution of people on account of their religious conviction currently involve the persecution of Christians. It is clear that the entire Islamic world – including the representatives of the Islamic faith, although they have no central institutions – is called on here finally to take action against such acts of violence and to clearly distance themselves from these acts. I believe that this is the only available course of action.

We have concerns in Syria and in Egypt and similar areas, and we know what the outcome was in Iraq, for example. For that reason, I believe that the fact that the External Action Service intends to appoint a Special Representative for Human Rights for this purpose is important, and, in this regard, the departments dealing with the persecution of Christians in particular must also be represented. This is not something that should only apply to Christians; we need to realise that it is relevant to all religious convictions, which must be permitted and must not be persecuted, but, as Europe, which is founded on Christianity, we should also have the opportunity to state very clearly that Christians must not be persecuted.

Konrad Szymański (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Nigeria today is yet another country where militant Islamists want to use force to impose religious law. The first victims have been the country's Christians. Northern Nigeria is the scene of religious cleansing and today, thousands of Nigerians have become the victims of aggression and murder. The introduction of Sharia law in further states will result not only in hostility, but also in discrimination against Christians over access to education, access to work and freedom to practise their religion.

Europe must not be indifferent to these developments, which threaten to end in a major tragedy. Our diplomatic service and the Member States' diplomatic services must do everything possible to protect Nigeria from the rising religious hostility. Using the Cotonou Agreement as a basis, we must intensify dialogue and political pressure so that no one in Nigeria thinks that crimes against minorities and religious liberty will go unpunished.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). - Mr President, Nigeria is still a recipient of aid after 50 years of independence. It suffers from a lack of economic development and the majority of its inhabitants live below the poverty line.

Is Nigeria so poor because it lacks resources? No. It is the world's eighth largest oil producer. This really is a puzzle. Nigeria is suffering from civil strife, a euphemism for Islamist violence against native Christians and Europeans working to industrialise the country out of poverty.

What can have caused these problems? It cannot, of course, be because of the nature of Islam or, of course, anything to do with ethnicity. These must be 'no-go areas' of course.

A Nigerian I once knew well blamed it on the colonialists, who drew straight lines on the map and included incompatible peoples arbitrarily in the same political state. This undoubtedly contributed to one war, the Biafran Secession in 1967. Of course, we Europeans would not make the same mistake would we? We would not dream of filling up the states of Europe with incompatible peoples. Well, would we? Of course we would not...!

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) Mr President, recent news on Nigeria recount, almost exclusively, violent incidents. This is a disturbing fact, all the more that we are witnessing the rise of religious extremism, which fuels a very significant number of attacks. The question is what can be done now to prevent this situation from worsening. Consequences would be disastrous in a country with over 170 million inhabitants, 250 ethnic groups and population percentages of 50% Muslims and 40% Christians. Tensions between different communities overlap with a very difficult economic environment: eighty-five per cent of the population lives on less than two dollars a day, although Nigeria has important oil reserves.

I would have liked the High Representative, had she been here, to present proposals for a more active EU contribution to promoting a peaceful and stable environment in Nigeria.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Andris Piebalgs, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, I believe that today's debate again demonstrated Parliament's strong engagement in supporting human rights and fighting against terrorism. We look forward to Parliament's continued support for the European Union's growing engagement with Nigeria. We will increase our contacts and cooperation with Nigeria, which is at a crucial juncture in its history. It faces serious problems, but there are also a lot of opportunities.

What can the Commission do in response to the troubles faced by Nigeria? Today, we are supporting Nigeria with EUR 200 million in the Niger Delta programme which is our support for fragile peace in the Delta. We are also considering how to support the northern Nigeria programme, where there are many development challenges. Just to mention one, education: northern Nigeria has some of the worst education indicators in the world with only 74% attending school and only about 5% finishing a full primary cycle. In effect, Boko Haram is deliberately depriving Nigerian children of the opportunity to better themselves, help their families and communities and find a way out of poverty. This means that engagement with Nigeria should be crucial.

The European Union regularly raises issues about religious freedoms with Nigeria in the context of the human rights dialogue. The rights of Christians should not be seen independently from the rights of Muslims in the country. I believe that this dialogue on human rights will be strengthened in the future. The High Representative has already engaged a great deal and she has a couple of new proposals that were discussed during the informal meetings with Foreign Affairs Ministers held last week in Denmark.

How can the European Union help Nigeria against Boko Haram? Following the ministerial meeting between the European Union and Nigeria, we have started to work on the package of support for Nigeria's counter-terrorist methods. This will be additional to, and complementary with, the EU Member States' action. It will focus on the root causes of radicalisation, especially poverty, marginalisation in society and lack of jobs. It will also have a dimension of justice and the rule of law. Nigeria is defining its own counter-terrorism strategy, which the EU will support fully, in accordance with human rights issues.

On the killing of two European hostages, I would just repeat the High Representative's statement of 9 March: 'I want to express my condolences to both families of the hostages in Nigeria for the tragic loss. We condemn in the strongest possible terms criminal actions like the taking of hostages. Perpetrators must be brought to justice and held accountable for their crimes'.

The last point I would like to emphasise concerns oil revenues. I believe that the Commission has now made a proposal for more transparency on the reporting of profits from natural wealth by the companies. I very much hope that this House will support these measures because we clearly understand that fighting against poverty also requires that all companies engage fully and transparently to report on the profits in a particular country.

President. - I have received seven motions for resolutions tabled in accordance with Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 15 March, at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Tunne Kelam (PPE), *in writing.* – The clashes in Nigeria have been in the news during the recent months, yet we practically lack feedback from HR/VP on these alarming developments. Now the EP is coming forward with its resolution on the social unrest and religiously motivated persecution of Christians in Nigeria. EP has repeatedly called on the EEAS to mainstream the aspect of freedom of religion and belief in its human rights dialogue with third countries and to train its staff on this. Religiously motivated intolerance in the world is on the rise and the EU has to step up its efforts to tackle this issue sooner rather than later. I call on the EU, together with the UN, to contribute to a peaceful settlement between the religious communities in Nigeria. It is our common interests to stop the spreading of violence towards Christian communities. Nigeria is among the resource richest countries in Africa with significant economic growth, but also among the most corrupt. The EU must, in its relations with Nigeria, seriously push for social and economic reforms that would channel the revenues from the oil industry for education and economic and social development, instead of re-distributing them among the elites. This will be the best way to avoid further clashes between religious communities.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR), *in writing.* – The recent attacks on Christians in Nigeria come amid worsening religious and ethnic tensions leading to deterioration in the precarious human rights situation in the country. I utterly condemn the suicide bombing of a service at St. Finbar's Church in Jos on 11 March which killed at least four people. My sympathies are with the families of the dead and wounded and I call upon the Nigerian Federal and State governments to bring those behind the bombing to justice while doing more to protect vulnerable communities, especially Christians, in northern and central parts of the country. The EU must support stability in Nigeria. However, Nigeria must demonstrate its willingness to end religious strife as well as re-commit itself to guaranteeing basic human rights including freedom of religion. The Nigerian Government must intervene in cases of those tried under Sharia law, especially those sentenced to death, amputation, flogging or other inhuman treatments. I am particularly concerned about women who are being lashed for committing adultery, especially in instances of rape. Nigeria must also show respect for the rights of its LGBT community and reconsider legislation criminalising homosexuality, which, under Sharia law in the north, is punishable by stoning to death.

16. Situation in Belarus (debate)

President. - The next item is the statements by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the situation in Belarus [2012/2581(RSP)].

Andris Piebalgs, *Member of the Commission, on behalf of the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.* – Mr President, I am very glad to be here today to discuss the situation in Belarus on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Ashton.

The European Union is increasingly concerned about the continued lack of respect for human rights and the rule of law in Belarus. Over the last months, the situation has gone from bad to worse, with further repressive measures and policies towards civil society and political opposition.

There are many concerns. The first of them is the immediate and unconditional release of all 12 political prisoners and their rehabilitation. The presence of political prisoners in the heart of Europe is a shame.

We are also deeply concerned about reports of torture and inhumane prison conditions of political prisoners. The Belarusian authorities are under an absolute obligation to ensure the respect of the prohibition of torture and inhuman treatment and have a responsibility to investigate reports thereof.

All harassment of members of the opposition, and of civil society, must stop, and their freedom of movement cannot be impeded. The increasingly draconian legislation that will further restrict the Belarusian citizens' freedoms of assembly and association, as well as provision of support to civil society, must be rolled back.

Belarus remains the only country in Europe to still apply capital punishment. As already highlighted in this House, the European Union remains opposed to capital punishment under all circumstances. Along the lines of the Parliament's resolution of 16 February, the European Union calls on the authorities of Belarus not to carry out the executions of Dmitry Kononov and Vladislav Kovalyov, and to introduce a moratorium on capital punishment in view of its eventual abolition.

The EU's policies are principled. We remain committed to a visible and united defence of our values – human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. It is clear that we cannot stay idle in face of developments in a country that is neighbouring three of our Member States.

The EU's restrictive measures are an important instrument to keep up political pressure, to strengthen our political message to Belarus. The European Union has repeatedly stressed that they remain open and under constant review. In January, the Council expanded the criteria to target those responsible for serious violations of human rights, the repression of civil society and opposition and persons or entities benefiting from or supporting the regime. As highlighted by High Representative/Vice-President Ashton after the February Foreign Affairs Council, work is currently ongoing in view of a decision to be taken by the 23 March Foreign Affairs Council, on the basis of a list of business interests supporting the regime or drawing benefits from it.

We have made clear that the EU's policies are not directed against Belarus as such, nor against its people. The EU maintains its policy of critical engagement, including through dialogue and the Eastern Partnership. We remain ready to develop our bilateral relations, depending on progress made by the authorities towards the respect for the principles of democracy, human rights and rule of law. As highlighted by High Representative/Vice-President Ashton in her joint statement with Secretary of State Clinton

in December 2011, the European Union remains willing to assist Belarus to meet its obligations in this regard.

The engagement with Belarusian civil society, the political opposition and the public at large is a crucial element of the EU's policies.

We remain ready to launch negotiations for visa facilitation and readmission agreements which would enhance people-to-people contacts to the benefit of the Belarusian population. It is regrettable that the Belarusian authorities have so far failed our invitation to start negotiations.

We will also step up our dialogue with civil society and the political opposition through a 'European dialogue on modernisation' with the Belarusian society on necessary reforms for the modernisation of Belarus and on the related potential development of relations with the European Union, as well as possible EU support in this regard. The European Union and its Member States want to reach out to Belarus and to share their successful experience of transition to democracy and market economy. Once conditions are ripe, the EU will also be ready to provide the right conditions for EU companies and financial institutions to support the country's transformation and to invest in Belarus's future privatisation process.

The European dialogue will be launched in Brussels on 29 March in Brussels: what we want to achieve is an open exercise taking in all political forces, and civil society, with substantial involvement by EU Member States.

In difficult times, it is important to maintain channels also of communication and information. This is why the EU upgraded its delegation in Minsk last summer.

Further to the request by the Belarusian authorities on 28 February that the EU Head of Delegation and the Ambassador of Poland should leave the country for consultations, the European Union agreed in a determined act of solidarity to withdraw all EU ambassadors for consultations. Our ambassadors fulfil a crucial function on the ground in Belarus as channels of communication and information and we remain committed to a unified and coordinated approach also to the issue of their return.

Unfortunately, nothing has happened until now to encourage us to change our policies towards the authorities in Minsk. Not the release of political prisoners and their rehabilitation. The persecution of opposition figures since the elections of December 2010 continues. Breaches of human rights continue. And, yes, further sanctions will probably not improve our bilateral relations with Minsk. This is regrettable but it is unavoidable if we are to remain true to our values.

I can only thank the honourable Members for their determination to face this difficult issue head-on. We owe it to the people of Belarus to show that we have solidarity with them in these difficult times and that there will be a European future when conditions allow.

The support of Members of this House in the unfolding situation in Belarus since the presidential elections of 19 December 2010 has been crucial to keep the issue high on the EU's agenda. It has also been crucial to maintain the political pressure on Belarus to change its current repressive policies and to take the necessary steps, which would allow it to find its proper place in European cooperation. We look forward to examining the resolution that this House will adopt tomorrow.

Jacek Protasiewicz, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (PL) Mr President, Mr Piebalgs, thank you very much for your very long, comprehensive and truthful policy statement on cooperation with Belarus. The fact is that our relations with Belarus – with our neighbour – and the domestic situation in Belarus are often discussed in this Chamber, and recently even very often. It was only in February that we discussed or we appealed for a moratorium on the use of capital punishment in Belarus.

Today, however, we are talking about the response of the Union to the diplomatic war declared on Europe two weeks ago by the authorities in Minsk. The effect of this war may be an intensification of the country's self-imposed isolation. I hope this prospect does not amuse anyone at all – not even anyone in Belarus, not even the undemocratically elected authorities – because the only consequence of greater isolation would be to advance the process by which Belarus is losing its independence.

Despite the irrational decision to ask the Ambassador of Poland and the EU Head of Delegation to leave Minsk, it is still possible to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. There is still time for Belarus to resume elementary relations with the Western world, but, of course, this would need the release of political prisoners, an end to the repression of opposition activists, independent journalists and human rights defenders, and preparations for parliamentary elections to be held in accordance with elementary, minimum European principles. In short, it is time for change, and this is an appeal to Minsk, before it is too late.

Libor Rouček, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – Mr President, as we state in our resolution, and as Mr Protasiewicz mentioned, the Belarus regime chooses self-isolation.

Unfortunately, it isolates not only itself but also the Belarusian people. This is not what we want. In our resolution and in our demands, we express solidarity with the Belarusian people. We want to show them – and we want them to know – that here in the European Parliament, in the European Union, we express our solidarity, our help and our hope that, in a similar way to Belarus's neighbours, Belarusian society and the Belarusian state will one day move along the path towards more human rights, more civic rights, more democracy and the rule of law.

The Belarusian economy is in dire straits. If we look at the budget deficit, the current account deficit and the future prospects, there is no way for an improvement without reforms. These reforms are not possible without reforming society, engaging in dialogue with young people, independent groups, the opposition, journalists and trade unions. Only in this way can a society – whether it is the Belarusian society or any other – be stable, and only in this way can both the society and the economy improve.

This is what we wanted to express in our resolution, part of which, of course, comprises our demands to release all political prisoners, no matter what their political affiliation. This is what we would like to express in our joint resolution. I think it is the view not only of the Socialists and Democrats but all democratic groups in this House.

Kristiina Ojuland, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – Mr President, the ALDE Group applauds the sound decision of the Member States to summon their ambassadors from Minsk to their respective ministries for consultations following the diplomatic conflict between the EU and Belarus.

The behaviour of President Lukashenko, both domestically and internationally, is scandalous, and the EU should not flatter him and his cronies by sending our representatives

to Minsk at ambassadorial level. Lukashenko has consistently ignored the international commitments of Belarus as a Member State of the OSCE. I would not like to see the distinguished ambassadors of the EU presenting their credentials to a criminal dictator.

There can be no progress in relations between the European Union and Belarus until the regime implements democratic reforms. Meanwhile, we should concentrate our efforts on engaging Belarusian civil society and the democratic opposition.

I would also encourage the International Ice Hockey Federation to move the 2014 World Championship from Belarus to another location. Lukashenko does not deserve the honour of hosting the championship. A dictator does not understand the principles of democracy; therefore, he does not understand the principle of sport: that of free competition.

Werner Schulz, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Belarus is in a state of emergency. Since the fraudulent re-election of President Lukashenko, the dictator has treated the opposition with brutal severity and terror.

Dozens of people, whose only crimes were to demand democracy and participation, have been given long prison sentences, with their confessions being obtained under torture. For this reason, the EU has imposed a travel ban for supporters of the regime who were involved in this, and it has also frozen their foreign accounts. This is a strategy, which, on the one hand, exerts pressure on the system and, on the other, supports civil society.

However, we should look closely at the extent to which these measures actually work, and why the Belarusian Interior Minister is able to travel to the Interpol conference in Lyon, for example, while the sons of the dictator can explore the world with total impunity as members of the National Olympic Committee. The freezing of accounts, which is a matter for the individual EU Member States, is also questionable.

As most companies in Belarus are owned by the state, the EU, with a trade surplus of USD 6 billion last year, has, unfortunately, become the largest supporter of Lukashenko's system, thereby keeping it going.

Targeted measures that affect the regime but harm the people in the country as little as possible would therefore be necessary. Economic sanctions against selected companies and intermediaries would have this effect, as the export of fertilisers, steel and crude oil products is 100% dependent on the West.

On the other hand, I do not think it is a good idea to relocate the World Ice Hockey Championships. This symbolic gesture may satisfy a few people, but it will affect the wrong people and is more likely to provide fuel for the dictator's propaganda. Indeed, we experienced this with the Olympics boycott in Moscow, and we refrained from taking this route in connection with Beijing. After all, if we were to apply the method of boycotting sport consistently, we would also have to refuse to hold the European Football Championships in Ukraine.

Marek Henryk Migalski, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – (PL) Mr President, this is a good resolution. It mentions all the things we always mention – maintenance of economic sanctions, release of political prisoners and a guarantee of the basic conditions needed for political cooperation, public activity and a free society. It demands the release of political prisoners, and I personally am very pleased that it includes the names of Dmitry Bandarenka and Ivan Shyla – people I have met and know personally. However, there is something else important here, something we also talk about from time to time – the support the European

Union gives to free media, because only free media can change the way Belarusians see their situation, so that in the free elections which are sure to come sooner or later, they will be able to vote with real freedom, democratically and in accordance with their own wishes.

What is new here, and its importance should be stressed, is that in contrast to one of the previous speakers, I think it is, in fact, very important that we have called for the Ice Hockey World Championships to be moved to another country than Belarus. Why? It is because a celebration such as a world championships must not be held in a place or a country where there is no cause for celebration, where political activists are in prison, and where torture is used on oppositionists. This is an important new aspect, and we should welcome its inclusion in the resolution.

Krišjānis Kariņš (PPE). – (LV) Mr President, Commissioner, I have four children. When one of my children gets angry with another, that second one always goes off to join a third. Why does he go off? It is because he has somewhere to go. Europe's relations with Belarus can actually be compared to relations between children. If we are not careful, we may send Belarus away from Europe altogether, because it has somewhere to go. Where is that? It is Russia, where, in recent years, democratic expression has decreased, not increased.

If we should like Belarus to get closer to Europe, then we must act very carefully and wisely. We must use both the carrot and the stick. The carrot would be not to reduce but to increase economic cooperation with Belarus. Through economic cooperation, we will achieve a situation where a section of the people become wealthier, and a prosperous class will be created. We can see that throughout North Africa, and in Russia itself, it is, in fact, the middle class, the affluent middle class, that demands democratic change in a country. The stick must be political sanctions, which, of course, maintain the requirements for the Belarus Government to respect human rights. Thank you for your attention.

Kristian Vigenin (S&D). – (BG) Mr President, the subject of today's debate is another extension of the sanctions against the Lukashenko regime and the fact that this is virtually causing a diplomatic war between Belarus and the European Union. I think that, as stated in the draft resolution, the European Union is responding correctly by not allowing itself to be split into good and bad Member States. It is providing an adequate response by clearly signalling to Lukashenko that the Member States of the European Union or the European Union as a whole cannot be blackmailed in this way.

However, the big question which we cannot basically find the answer to is: what else can we do as a European Parliament, a European Union and based on the commitment of individual Member States to change the situation in this country? How can we support civil society and what else can we do so that political prisoners are freed and to ensure that there will be no more political prisoners in Belarus? How should we bring about a gradual shift towards democratisation in Belarus so that the next elections will at least be a little more honest and a little more democratic than what we saw during the previous parliamentary elections?

I think that we do not seem to be showing enough imagination in this area, and the methods we are resorting to seem again to be either tightening the sanctions or applying what is the new element in this resolution: we mention the option of imposing targeted economic sanctions. We must, of course, carefully remark at this point that they must not affect the citizens of Belarus. We are also talking about the World Ice Hockey Championships and it possibly being moved somewhere other than Belarus. I feel that this sounds more like a

desperate move on our part. If this action is implemented, let us give it a try, but I do not think that it will produce the result sought after.

However, it is important for us not to close the door and to use every opportunity. We will do this under the auspices of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. We will continue our efforts, and let us still hope that we achieve results. We must all put our heads together about how to change this situation.

Ivars Godmanis (ALDE). – (LV) Mr President, although, by and large, I support all the points in this resolution, particularly regarding sanctions that are directed against those who are directly responsible for repressive acts against representatives of political and social organisations in Belarus, I think that it is not right to include the point on the ice hockey championships in the resolution. Firstly, the championship is in 2014, and there is still time to achieve progress, instead of saying that there will be none by 2014. Secondly, it is very important to understand that during the championship, a very large number of people will have come to Belarus. The fans and many others will be able to have direct contact with Belarusians and freely express their opinions and, to a certain extent, pass on information, perhaps not through politicians, but directly, on what the situation is. This will actually be of help to us. The championship will assist the process for which we are striving, rather than hampering it.

Paweł Robert Kowal (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I think it is time we said what the European Union's policy on Belarus has been in recent years, what it is like, and how it is viewed in Minsk. Fantasies and illusions; every six months, a change of position; thaws and freezes. It has ended the way it has, and now we are wondering what to do about it. So I propose that instead of starting with harsh words and a show of sabre-rattling, it is time we gave the matter some thought and began at last to pursue a consistent policy, so that the Member States do not work against each other or talk officially about human rights while quietly agreeing terms over some nice little investment, because all of this is getting us nowhere, and Belarus is going nowhere. The only one who is happy about all this is Mr Lukashenko.

The most important thing today is to support the opposition, to show unequivocal support for the opposition, and demonstrate that it is they who are our partners. Lukashenko must hear from us that if there is to be another – quote – 'thaw', it will only happen in connection with specific changes. First and foremost, this means freedom for the press, independent newspapers, freedom in the Internet and an end to censorship. We should give him these conditions. He will never change his position on elections, because he cannot bring himself to do this. If we start making another agreement with him about some kind of election, we will end up going back to the same policy: fantasies, mood swings, every six months a new approach from the European Union – all this will only encourage Lukashenko to treat the opposition badly and keep oppositionists in prison. I have one simple piece of advice – we need to be consistent.

Inese Vaidere (PPE). – (LV) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the situation in Belarus is serious, and it is getting worse. The number of arrests of politicians is growing, as is the number of questionable trials, and threats to opponents of the regime and the press. There are bans on visas for journeys to and from the European Union. Tragically, following a questionable trial with unconvincing evidence, the death penalty was imposed on two young men. The time and place when the sentence will be carried out has been kept secret, even from their relatives. At the same time, it must be

acknowledged that the expulsion of ambassadors confirms that the regime's nerves are failing, and so we must continue to stress that the development of our relations is directly dependent on its ability to fulfil commitments in the sphere of human rights and the rule of law.

Of course, Belarus is a small state, and is not rich in natural or energy resources. However, in stepping up the sanctions against the Lukashenko regime, we must refrain from the double standards that we sometimes adopt when assessing similar events, in Russia, for instance. Specific sanctions against the main actors within the regime must be widened, to include a ban on travelling to the European Union and freezing property and bank accounts. Sanctions must be directed against specific persons and entrepreneurs who support the regime, but not against the people or small traders. If we suspend cooperation with Belarus, then it is the people of Belarus that will suffer most and, for our part, we shall no longer be their allies, but people who have done them wrong. The regime's leadership will pull through, though, by putting the blame for its difficulties on us. Our sanctions must serve as a political tool, and that means they should also support the civil society of Belarus.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – (LT) Mr President, will a Cold War gust and the expulsion of ambassadors lead to a return to dialogue? The authorities in Minsk can still choose the sort of relationship they want to have with the European Union. However, it is regrettable that recently, they seem to be turning more and more into a dead end of isolationism. This means that once again, there will be no choice in the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Belarus. Minsk could revive relations with the European Union by freeing and rehabilitating all political prisoners, and this would not mean giving in to EU pressure, but would be a step towards implementing fundamental human rights in the country. I believe that both Belarus' partners in Euronest and Russia should encourage Belarus to take such action. The EU does not want to worsen relations, which have already hit rock bottom, so that ordinary people in the EU and Belarus do not suffer. There are no insurmountable arguments that would prevent European Union countries from cooperating with their neighbour Belarus. The fate of that country will be decided in Belarus itself and we should therefore welcome the increased activity of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. Recently, members of the opposition and journalists were prevented from leaving the country and such cases are becoming more frequent. I believe that the European Union should draw attention to such things and require Minsk to also implement freedom of movement, which is one of the fundamental rules of democracy.

IN THE CHAIR: ROBERTA ANGELILLI

Vice-President

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, Mr Piebalgs, I have already thanked the High Representative, Baroness Ashton, at the meeting of the Committee on Development, for the fact that this time, decisions on Belarus were fast, unequivocal and specific. All the indications are that the European Union's reaction has made an impression on the President of Belarus, so perhaps we have at last found a way to make what we do about Belarus more effective.

This method is to take action which, for a variety of reasons, will be painful for the Belarusian authorities. So I agree with Mr Migalski that Belarus should not be the host of the Ice Hockey World Championships in 2014. Why? It is because the championships would certainly be an opportunity for President Lukashenko to get himself some good

publicity and to present Belarus as a normal country where normal sports competitions are held. However, this is not true. It is not a normal country; it is a country where fundamental human rights are violated and where there is no democracy, and the world championships should not be held in a place whose people are denied fundamental rights and freedoms.

Incidentally, the tolerant attitude to sport seen in politics meant that the Beijing Olympics did not result in any beneficial changes in China in the field of human rights, so the argument for tolerance is difficult to accept. We must not allow the neutral character of sport to be used to manipulate public opinion and build a false image of normality. So moving the world championships is an important demand and I fully support it.

Kyriakos Mavronikolas (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament is in favour of development partnerships with countries in Eastern Europe. Such partnerships will promote democratic institutions, improve energy security and support social and economic reform.

The European Union's objective is to achieve political and social reforms in Belarus, so that there can be real democratisation in the country. In addition to adhering to the EU's harsh line towards the current regime concerning the exclusion of the opposition and civil society from the political scene, the Union is trying to involve the whole of Belarus society in efforts to implement the vision of creating a truly European country.

At the same time, a clear political objective needs to be set for the Union's involvement in Belarus, within the framework of a more coordinated and careful approach, especially now that the country faces a serious democratic deficit. The disregard for democratic values and the rule of law, human rights abuses and the imprisonment of opposition politicians, which are a fact of life in this country, are deplorable and need special treatment on the part of the Union.

Peter Šťastný (PPE). - Madam President, my meeting last week with the Belarusian opposition was a good reminder of the harsh reality of life in Belarus. People there deserve the same or at least similar treatment, freedoms and rights as we enjoy in the EU. Instead, political prisoners, interrogations, persecutions and various kinds of repression are still the norm among citizens living in constant fear.

Lukashenko's regime was condemned around the world, including by a unanimous US Senate resolution, a European Parliament resolution and, recently, a US law signed by Mr Obama in January called the Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act.

The relocation of the 2014 IHF World Championship is an integral part of all these legislative acts. Ice hockey should not be a tool to promote repressive, undemocratic regimes. The IHF is responsible for protecting the reputation of the sport, and they should relocate elsewhere until there have been meaningful improvements in Belarus.

Around one billion citizens clearly demand, through their representatives, such action from the IHF. I hope the delegates of the next IHF Congress in Helsinki will vote in a way which will fully satisfy the legitimate demands of the democratic world.

Corina Crețu (S&D). - (RO) Madam President, escalating tensions between the European Union and Belarus have reached an unprecedented point, culminating in mutual withdrawal of ambassadors. I think that the fact that Belarus is a neighbouring country, as well as its importance within the Eastern Partnership, are reasons to seek a solution to this situation,

and I believe we need to get the regime in Minsk to respect the fundamental rights of citizens and allow the establishment of democracy in the country. To achieve this, concrete progress should be made, such as the termination of persecutions against the opposition, the release of political prisoners, the organisation of free elections and an opening of Belarus to European values. Last but not least, we must consider the fact that Belarusian citizens, internationally isolated, are suffering once more, hardly coping with economic hardship, poverty, record inflation and a huge trade deficit.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Sari Essayah (PPE). - (FI) Madam President, the opposition in Belarus is under significant pressure from the Lukashenko administration. Many civil rights activists are prohibited from travelling, the offices of organisations have been investigated, computers have been taken away and leaders have been detained. According to the latest information we have, for the fourth time now, the Belarusian Minister for Justice has rejected the application for the registration of the Christian Democracy party.

I support the extension of all sanctions as well as the demands to release political prisoners. I also wish to express my support for the proposal made by Ms Ojuland and Mr Štátný that we should all appeal to the International Ice Hockey Federation, which is holding its next congress in Helsinki, for the arrangements for Belarus to host the games in 2014 to be cancelled. This is not a question of a boycott – boycotts always harm sport. The tournament should go ahead, but not in Belarus. It should not be made to boost Lukashenko's prestige.

Elena Bănescu (PPE). –(RO) Madam President, the deterioration of relations with Belarus places the EU in a paradoxical and undesirable situation – that of having diplomatic tensions with a neighbouring state, a member of the Eastern Partnership. However, this state of affairs will change only when Lukashenko's regime ceases its political repression of the opposition and civil society. The reaction of authorities is only isolating the country internationally. For instance, the latest report submitted by Reporters Without Borders lists Belarus as an enemy of the Internet because of the restrictions on online expression, while the IMF has recently announced its refusal to negotiate a loan with this country. However, it is primarily the population who feels the economic consequences.

I would have liked to ask the High Representative how we can limit the effects on citizens, while maintaining a firm attitude towards the authorities.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, Mr Piebalgs, for many years, we have all witnessed these strange scenes and cat-and-mouse games being played by President Lukashenko, who makes eyes first at the West and then at Moscow, while at the same time destroying the opposition with a heavy hand, attacking journalists, damaging non-governmental organisations and fighting national minorities – things which, in fact, he is still doing. So I am very pleased that this reaction, this joint reaction and the recall of ambassadors for consultations, is the first sign of a joint reaction from the European Union – not just the EU institutions, but also the Member States. Furthermore, I hope we will continue to be equally consistent – both the EU institutions and the Member States – in our dealings with the Lukashenko regime, and, of course, this also means the Ice Hockey World Championships, which definitely should not be held in Belarus, because we should not give Mr Lukashenko reason to celebrate.

Norica Nicolai (ALDE). – (RO) Madam President, although, at the Eastern Partnership summit in Prague, this country committed to respect human rights, it is becoming increasingly disreputable. I think Belarus is the closest country to the European Union and the furthest away from European values. I would like to point out that sanctions should also be applied within the Eastern Partnership. We need to enter into discussions with members of this partnership, especially with neighbouring countries, in order to put pressure on the regime in Minsk to change its attitude, to the extent that somebody like Lukashenko is capable of doing. However, I have serious doubts about Lukashenko's willingness to change his behaviour.

Why should we not cooperate with Russia as well in this endeavour? For Russia would have an opportunity to show its commitment to values that are human, perennial and not specific only to the European Union, as Russia, too, adheres to international documents, and I mean, in particular, UN documents.

End of the catch-the-eye procedure

Andris Piebalgs, *Member of the Commission.* – Madam President, in the name of Vice-President/High Representative Ashton, I would like to thank you for your interest and engagement in EU relations with Belarus.

EU policy aims to remain engaged with the country and its people. The European Union will firstly continue to provide support, both political and financial, to civil society, which is at the forefront of the vital work to secure a democracy, basic rights and freedoms in the country.

Secondly, we will provide political – and, if necessary, financial – support to the victims of the repression. We cannot leave them alone in a situation where their only hope for release and rehabilitation would be international support.

Thirdly, we will keep targeting the restrictive measures, thereby reinforcing the political message that we are sending to the Belarusian authorities.

We are not interested in harming the Belarusian people. We aim to target the people who are responsible for repression. It is very clear from this debate that we all believe that the future of Belarus is in the hands of the Belarusian people.

They should have a fair chance to take these decisions and, unfortunately today, this is not the case. This is why the EU should continue to engage, and I understand some of the decisions taken will always be discussed in this House. But I believe basically that, as I have heard from this debate, the High Representative/Vice-President's line is very much supported by Parliament, and we will follow your resolution to be adopted tomorrow very closely.

President. – I have received six motions for resolutions tabled in accordance with Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, Thursday, 15 March, at 12.00.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Alexander Mirsky (S&D), *in writing.* – If someone in the European Parliament wants to change the situation in the Republic of Belarus by pressure and dictate, then it is a way to nowhere. Recently, a lot has been said about freedom of speech and democratic values

which are violated in Belarus. Behind that are standing different national and financial groups of European Parliament lobbyists. Nobody wants real dialogue with the current governing power in Belarus. Why then does the EU not talk about China, where the number of political prisoners is a hundred times higher? I do not understand those who cover their financial interests by 'democratic values'. We become hilarious and vulnerable when, because of a bunch of political losers, we want to harm attitudes both towards the people of Belarus and the important sporting event, the World Ice Hockey Championship. I am against such an approach and I insist on the wording 'Sport beyond politics'.

17. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

18. Maritime piracy (debate)

President. – The next item is the Commission statement on maritime piracy (2011/2962(RSP)).

Andris Piebalgs, *Member of the Commission.* – Madam President, the Commission is well aware of the threat piracy is posing to European – and not only European – ships and crews. It is unacceptable that criminal gangs are allowed to continue to take the international shipping lanes hostage and bring suffering to thousands of seafarers and their families – not to mention the threat to the stability and prosperity of the region and Somalia itself.

We all agree that only a comprehensive approach can bring a sustainable solution to the problem of piracy.

Containing maritime piracy at sea and ending impunity are two important elements of the EU's comprehensive approach to combat piracy. Others relate to building regional capacities and the stabilisation of Somalia itself. Also, we definitely should not forget cooperation with the maritime industry.

When it comes to containing piracy at sea, the most visible of all EU counter-piracy action is EU NAVFOR – Operation Atalanta. The Council has just decided to prolong its mandate to December 2014.

But how do we make sure justice is served, once suspects have been arrested by the naval forces? One way of addressing impunity is by the prosecution of piracy suspects in the region. The Commission directly supports countries in the region which have accepted transfers for prosecution by EU NAVFOR and established a joint programme with the UN in support of judicial capacities. This cooperation is an excellent example of how Commission programmes and common security and defence policy actions go hand in hand.

Piracy has to be understood as organised crime that is happening at sea and on land. In the long run, only the establishment of the rule of law, good governance and economic development will bring the solutions we are seeking. The EU is therefore strongly committed to supporting Somalia in finding a political solution to the ongoing crisis. At the recent London conference, the international community showed strong determination to support the transition process in Somalia.

To date, the EU is the biggest donor to Somalia, having committed EUR 415 million for development aid through the European Development Fund for the period 2008 to 2013.

On top of these bilateral funds come additional budget funds from horizontal lines and EUR 77 million during 2011 for humanitarian aid.

Part of the new development funds will be directed to supporting the fishing industry, building alternative livelihoods and helping coastal communities and rural development more generally, thus tackling some of the root causes of piracy.

The European Union is also supporting the development of Somali security capacities. In addition to the training of police officers – we also provide some financial support if they stay in the service of the Somali Government – we are the main donor to the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia, which is funded through the African Peace Facility. Since 2007 the European Union has provided EUR 325 million and the Commission is proposing additional support for AMISOM.

As in the area of counter-piracy efforts, Commission action is closely linked with Council-led CSDP actions such as the EU Training Mission to Somalia (EUTM).

There is also an important role for the maritime industry to play in containing the threat of piracy. It is vital to implement International Maritime Organisation-supported 'best management practices' on board ships under EU Member State flags.

Let me also assure you that the Commission is following very closely the case of two Italian marines, Salvatore Girone and Massimiliano Latorre, who are now in custody in India. We have been in constant touch with the Italian Government on this issue from the beginning. Following Italy's request for assistance, the EU has raised the issue with the Indian authorities both in Brussels and in New Delhi, encouraging a positive outcome as soon as possible. Yesterday, the High Representative, Cathy Ashton, also discussed these matters with Prime Minister Mario Monti, who thanked the High Representative for the EU's efforts.

It is clear that we need to address this issue in the broader context of our cooperation on counter-piracy and, more specifically, the regulation of armed protection aboard ships. We need to see what lessons we can learn to prevent this type of incident from happening ever again. The European Union and India had already agreed in principle to work on these broader policy issues, and this is what we are currently also taking forward.

But we have to differentiate between this case of EU Member States' security forces protecting commercial shipments and using private contractors for armed deterrence on board commercial ships and even distant fishing vessels.

Due to the immensity of the sea area where Somali pirates now operate and the scarce naval resources available to protect this shipping lane, the industry has had no other choice than to turn to the services provided by privately contracted armed security personnel on board ships transiting the high-risk areas. This is an increasing phenomenon that we cannot ignore.

The International Maritime Organisation has already addressed this item and issued interim recommendations but, as no solution to piracy is apparent in the short term, we believe this must be addressed in more depth.

We are not confident with the idea of self-regulation by this new business in view of the risks involved in this kind of activity, which can potentially lead to the – sometimes lethal – use of force. In this regard, we think that the IMO is the international body that should lead to the development of very clear, stringent rules and, in particular, of a mandatory instrument.

Ensuring prosecution of pirates captured at sea only takes care of one part of the problem. It is therefore vital to increase the 'risk/reward' ratio for those who benefit most from piracy, and the EU has decided to step up its efforts to break the underlying business model. Law enforcement agencies of EU Member States, Interpol and Europol are currently cooperating, not only in attempting to trace any flows going into EU Member States, but also in collecting evidence packages against leaders, financiers and instigators.

Another element of the EU comprehensive approach is the support of the region. It is in the strategic interest of regional countries to engage in the fight against piracy. The EU is definitely keen to assist and enhance local ownership. This is why the European Union has been a strong supporter of the Eastern and Southern Africa – Indian Ocean Regional Strategy and Action Plan, which was adopted in October 2010 in Mauritius to fight piracy and promote maritime security.

Support measures are under way, and up to EUR 40 million of further support is currently under consideration. We have also been enhancing the surveillance capacities of our partner countries through the EU's network of fisheries partnership agreements, which strengthen our relations with the countries in the Western Indian Ocean area, and the regional surveillance programme, which we have been financing with EUR 10 million from 2007 to 2011, and which is going to be renewed.

The Critical Maritime Routes Programme funded under the Instrument for Stability has also focused since 2009 on the security and safety of essential maritime routes in the areas affected by piracy. In close coordination with the IMO, one of the projects contributes to the implementation of the regional Djibouti Code of Conduct.

I would like to thank the European Parliament especially for requesting a pilot project on 'maritime awareness', which will provide technical tools to help the authorities to be aware of what goes on at sea. These programmes will work very closely with the planned Regional Maritime Capacity Building Mission.

Georgios Koumoutsakos, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, no one could have predicted a few years ago that piracy would be such a serious threat today to international trade and shipping and to regional and international security. Above all, however, piracy is a threat to the security and lives of thousands of seafarers and workers on ships that cross the danger zones in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean.

As we speak, hundreds of seafarers are being held hostage. They and their families will live on tenterhooks for hours, days or even months. The humanitarian dimension of piracy alone forces us to take more decisive action. Piracy has become a very lucrative business for pirates, with large profits at little risk. Their tactics are developing and their operational capacity is increasing impressively in an area of huge strategic importance to the international economy. Three million barrels of oil and approximately 50% of global container trade cross this area every day. The annual cost of piracy is calculated to be between USD 7 and 12 billion.

Piracy is a strategic-type threat; it is a shared challenge that requires collective action. The causes of piracy are rooted on land, but their results are felt at sea. With the biggest fleet in the world, the European Union needs to act more decisively. Today, we need to take a decisive lead in international efforts to combat piracy. The coming months will be crucial.

In coordination with the International Maritime Organisation, the UN and NATO, it is high time that we identified the flow of illegal and black money, that we plugged legal loopholes, so that pirates can be prosecuted effectively, that we uprooted the diaspora of pirate bases in the area as a whole, and that we promoted the definition of exclusive economic zones in the area in accordance with the international law of the sea.

Commissioner, I listened very carefully to what you said. I would add that another positive step has been made with the appointment of a representative in the Horn of Africa. That is a positive development. As I said, I listened carefully to all the measures. They are all positive. Do you know what is missing as far as I am concerned? Decisiveness. I have not seen the decisiveness we are calling for. We expect far more.

Saïd El Khadraoui, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (NL) Madam President, piracy is a phenomenon which continues to cause us concern and which merits the European institutions' attention. Last year, there were no fewer than 300 attacks and attempted attacks on ships in a danger zone which, only a few years ago, was limited to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Aden, but which has, in the meantime, extended to encompass practically the entire West Indian Ocean. Twenty-five ships were actually hijacked and more than 400 crew members held hostage. We have also had 11 deaths.

In just the first two months of this year, 35 attempted hijackings have already taken place, with three ships actually being hijacked. This situation means that crew members are having to risk their lives simply to do their jobs. However, we are also suffering significant economic loss, directly or indirectly, in the form of demands for ransoms, higher insurance premiums, detours having to be made in order to avoid hazardous areas, Operation Atalanta itself, obviously, higher food prices, etc., the total costs of which could be estimated at many billions. What we therefore need is additional and *sustained* action.

While Operation Atalanta has, indeed, been extended until the end of 2014, in a few years' time, the number of ships actively contributing to the operation will be reduced from 35 to 10 and, at one point at the start of this year, that number dropped to as few as three ships. Tackling piracy requires a comprehensive approach, of course – as you have already mentioned – in Somalia itself, in the region.

In addition, we are finding that the pressure on shipping companies to take responsibility for the safety of their ships and crew into their own hands, by employing private security firms, is increasing every day. We therefore need to look very closely at that. A number of EU flag states allow this, others do not. It is desirable that the European Commission comes up with clear guidelines regulating this: for example, to agree arrangements for training criteria for security agencies, procedures concerning the use of arms, recording of incidents, the nature of weapons which may be held on board, etc.

I would like to ask you to comment in greater detail on this and to clarify how you view this matter; and I also ask you not to wait for the IMO. Take action on this issue now and, of course, on any of the other issues which members here are undoubtedly going to raise.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, I would like to begin this speech by talking about people. Our first priority is to free the men and women who remain kidnapped by pirates, in whichever sea they operate.

Hundreds of human beings are suffering as a result of a crime that has serious psychological consequences. They require specialist attention and recognition, as well as support, which they have not had up to now. The hostages in these kidnappings suffer because of the

actions of organised criminal groups, which are very violent and operate outside the European Union. European and state regulations have to recognise this situation.

The humanitarian aid, merchant and fishing fleets that suffer at the hands of piracy are carrying out lawful, honest activities protected by international law. In the case of fishing, good environmental practices are being observed and local development is being supported.

From this perspective, the pirates cannot justify their attacks, nor can we allow them to. Therefore, it is necessary to extend Operation Atalanta, and I ask: why has there been a reduction in the resources made available and what is your view on the Somali authorisation to attack pirate bases on the coast? Commissioner, I would like you to answer these two questions.

Poverty is what makes many turn to piracy. Today, there are more than 3 500 criminals of this kind operating in organised groups in the Indian Ocean alone. Piracy forces up the cost of operations of shipowners, those working on the seas and public administrations by around EUR 5 billion per year. We will all benefit if we add a fraction of this amount to what we already put towards development and cooperation, because we can eliminate this misery.

In 2011, only 13% of the 237 attacks that took place were successful, as opposed to 27% that succeeded in 2010. However, the ransoms paid have broken all records. Let us pledge to insist on this action before it is too late.

Keith Taylor, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, Parliament started to draft a resolution on this, led by the Committee on Transport and Tourism, for which I am the Green shadow.

We recognise that maritime piracy is an extremely complicated and problematic issue, but we also believe that it is a horizontal one, incorporating development, security and foreign affairs aspects, while the link with transport issues is more secondary. I am given to understand that the reason why the Transport Committee is the leading committee is because the Commission's Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport wants to lead on this instead of DG Development.

Greens are completely against this shift, as solutions to maritime piracy do not lie primarily with changes to transport policy. Therefore, we welcome the fact that this resolution was taken off the agenda for this plenary session. If Parliament is determined to have a resolution on this, we think it should be led by another committee such as the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, as well as being better timed in order to tie in with the external work and developments.

Apart from the fact that we do not think that the Transport Committee should be leading on this issue, the solutions in the draft resolution are not in line with previous Parliament resolutions on piracy, Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, they are too militarily based. We are against further militarisation and strongly in favour of strengthening the criminal justice approach to piracy, as advocated by the United Nations Special Advisor on Piracy, Mr Jack Lang.

This, ultimately, would also need a change in any future resolution from this place on this issue.

Peter van Dalen, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (NL) Over recent years, the problems with piracy have done nothing but grow. What we are seeing is that more and more ships are

being captured, more sailors taken hostage and that the area in which the pirates are operating has grown considerably. The price paid has also increased, in terms of both lives lost and ransoms. Hundreds of seafarers are currently being held captive in camps in Somalia, in a situation that you and I would hope to never find ourselves.

It is thus high time to adopt a more robust approach to piracy. This, I believe, involves four elements.

1. The Member States really need to pull out all the stops to free captive sailors and, for me, that also includes targeted actions on the Somali coast.
2. The Member States of the EU now, for once, need to agree to the deployment of certified, armed security personnel on board. At the moment, we have a situation where some Member States allow these security personnel, while others do not. The pirates, however, know exactly how these ships sail and follow them precisely, so they know which ships have no security personnel on board. The result is an extra risk for those ships specifically. Thus, while we are dealing with a security risk, we are also dealing with competition.
3. There are indications that those at the top of the piracy gangs are laundering money via banks in Africa and Europe. This means that the security services need to follow these money trails and ensure that the banks involved are dealt with.
4. Somalia is a lawless society. The Commission needs to produce a plan to set Somalia right. For me, Commissioner Piebalgs, there needs to be a little more ambition, and I would like to hear what you have to say in response.

Younous Omarjee, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (FR) Madam President, in this debate, we are also daring to shed light on some uncomfortable truths, truths about the root causes of piracy.

Firstly, there are the fisheries agreements imposed by the European Union which coordinate the shameless pillaging of Somali territorial waters. It is this pillaging and also that of illegal fishing that has ruined the lives of thousands of families of fishermen and made young people turn towards piracy. Every year, USD 450 million worth of fish is caught, depriving the Somali population, one of the poorest populations in the world, of a vital food and economic resource.

Another truth that is often brushed under the carpet: the waters off the Horn of Africa have become a veritable dumping ground for toxic waste, waste of any kind, including radioactive waste, which is being dumped in violation of the rules of international law. Ultimately, under the pretext of combating piracy, it is, in fact, foreign policy interests, geostrategic interests and economic interests that are being served.

That is the real story; that is how this phenomenon has been able to develop. While we are focusing on this fight which, I agree, is necessary for ensuring the security of our maritime highways, the real bandits – in Africa's case the multinationals – are continuing to act with total impunity.

Juozas Imbrasas, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (LT) Madam President, there has been an increase in the number of criminal assaults against fishing, merchant and passenger vessels in international waters. This poses a risk to the lives and security of both crew and passengers and has a significant negative impact on international trade. It is therefore essential to ensure the unimpeded passage and protection of vessels plying their trade legally on the high seas because this is a precondition for international trade. Legal instruments dealing

with piracy and armed robbery must be reviewed, updated and adapted to today's situation as soon as possible, with a view to prosecuting and passing sentence on the perpetrators of such crimes under existing international law. There should be a particular focus on strengthening the security of vessels, on possible assistance for ships' crews and their family members, the actions of international organisations in the fight against piracy and other important and necessary initiatives. Both political and legislative efforts must be concentrated on developing a global response to the challenges posed by modern piracy and armed assaults on vessels in order to eradicate a phenomenon such as piracy.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE), *Blue-card question to Younous Omarjee. – (ES)* Madam President, you mentioned fishing boats fishing illegally. I would ask you whether you are aware of how European boats fish within the framework of agreements signed by the European Union, with good practices that could be used as an international model and reference and, furthermore, whether you know that, for example, 80% of local development in the Seychelles comes as a result of there being a European fleet present, which the inhabitants of this region asked for?

I would also like to ask you what you mean when you talk about illegal fishing – because your speech caused some confusion – and who you are talking about? I believe that the European fleet, acting under the agreements signed by the European Union, is, as I have already said, an international reference and model. Were this model to be followed, the sustainability of global fisheries would be different. Therefore, I would like you, if possible, to answer these questions.

Younous Omarjee (GUE/NGL), *Blue-card answer. – (FR)* Madam President, I am ready for the debate. If you had listened very carefully to what I was saying, I made a distinction between the fisheries agreements, on the one hand, and illegal fishing, on the other. Clearly, we see this problem of piracy in different ways, since I am also taking into consideration the interests of the African people and the Horn of Africa. We can prolong this debate indefinitely but my text is clear and I think that I have defended a position which is undoubtedly unpopular, but which also needed to be expressed here.

Mathieu Grosch (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, maritime piracy is not a new topic for us in this House. We had a resolution on this as long ago as 2009. In the Committee on Transport and Tourism, we do not want to turn this into a procedural issue, either. We want to help the people concerned and are happy to draw up a resolution jointly with the other committees that feel that they are affected and are able to help. That is therefore the approach that we have decided upon.

Maritime piracy is primarily a threat to people. As my fellow Member has already said, it is also a threat to foreign trade, but also to local fisheries. That is also something we must not forget. Most importantly, it is even a threat to aid programmes that need to reach the area and are also threatened. It is also clear that in recent years, precisely as a result of this threat, this profession – which is a very interesting one that is also internationally recognised – is suffering terribly as a result, because this threat continues to exist for the people at local level. First of all, therefore – and this was already included in the 2009 resolution – we would like the EU to take the initiative. The International Maritime Organisation is – with all due respect – too weak and too slow.

We need to take the initiative – in connection with the legal framework and certification – so that people who are responsible for ensuring security in future do not find themselves in situations like that of two colleagues from Italy, and so that we do not also have an

uncertain framework there in future. Thus, we need to tackle this problem and show greater initiative at EU level in order to then place this issue on the international stage. That is what we expect. That is also something that we are happy to discuss with the other committees.

Ana Gomes (S&D). – (PT) Madam President, piracy is a serious problem, although it is not the only one or the most serious problem off the coast of the Horn of Africa. To combat it effectively, the European Union has to put in place a comprehensive strategy for the region. This implies attacking the source of the piracy, which is not located at sea, but on land. It lies in the lack of government, governance and representative bodies to protect the interests of the Somali people. As Operation Atalanta does not fit within such a strategy, it is failing to achieve its objectives, despite its importance as a naval mission in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy. Worse, piracy is now sophisticated and has the wind in its sails, and Al-Shabaab has grown, armed itself, and become more radical.

The principal mandate of Atalanta is to protect international shipping off the Somali coast. However, what is the European Union doing in relation to the many other maritime crimes committed by foreign ships in the same waters, from illegal fishing to dumping of toxic waste? What information has Brussels received about this matter from Atalanta during the three years the operation has already been in place, to fulfil the mandate that it also has regarding fishing within 200 miles of the Somali coast? Can this information be supplied to Parliament? Has the European Union submitted this information to the UN and requested that the Security Council look at it?

Somalia and the region need a strengthened and concerted effort at political, diplomatic, economic and military – on land as well as at sea – levels, involving the UN, the African Union, the United States, the European Union, India, China and other powers, but founded on the concept of human security so that it can meet the Somali people's need for sovereignty and development, which lie at the root of the piracy industry. Such an effort must produce results in building representative bodies in Somalia, which are demonstrably not being achieved by the artificial Transitional Federal Government sustained by invading troops from neighbouring Ethiopia, and it must not keep ignoring the potential for governance that could expand from the autonomous areas of Puntland and Somaliland, with which the European Union has to work.

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

Peter van Dalen (ECR), *Blue-card question.* – (NL) Madam President, what Ms Gomes has had to say has been impressive, but changing Somalia is not something that can be done overnight; it is something that will take I do not know how many years.

This is a problem right now. Seafarers are being held captive right now. Ships are being captured and people taken hostage right now. In light of that, I would like to ask you what you think of the idea of these ships carrying armed security personnel in order to ensure that they are able to sail through the region safely. We do need to fix Somalia, but we are also facing a problem now. What do you have to say about that?

Ana Gomes (S&D), *Blue-card answer.* – Madam President, I do not think that private security firms are the solution, but the EU, I would agree, can be. This is not a problem that can be solved overnight. It is a problem that has existed since at least 2005. The EU should have an autonomous strategy for Somalia.

If we look at how much money we have spent in the whole operation and at the results, including in fighting piracy, these are quite limited, because our objectives cannot be achieved until the core question of the governance in Somalia is addressed. The effort is too big for the EU alone. It has to act in concert with others in the international community. How much money could have been saved, though, if something more meaningful had been done for governance in Somalia. Nothing has been done so far.

Our strategy has been to follow the US totally in a very non-critical way. That is why we are where we are and unhappy with the results, including in fighting piracy and hostage taking. Until we address the question of governance in Somalia – and not with a fake institution like the TFG, the transitional government – we will not improve the situation for ships passing through those waters.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, Somali pirates are tirelessly attacking cargo boats off their coasts. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean is not on the decline, as we have just heard. On the contrary, captures of hostages, demands for ransoms, disappearances and robberies on the high seas are becoming more frequent every day. The incidents are not only frequent, but often very violent and it is useless to look towards the past. We must see how we are going to build the future, since pirates are also no longer hesitating to enter the territorial waters of foreign states, so anything is possible.

I, myself, was on a mission a few months ago in the Gulf of Aden with sailors from Operation Atalanta and I can tell you that I am sure that without their brave action, the attacks would be even more frequent, even more violent and even more dangerous.

I have two fundamental questions. The first concerns the outcomes of the arrests and subsequent detentions of pirates and the problem with regard to their sentencing. Today, when pirates are apprehended, at great risk to the sailors, they are held for a statutory period of time directly on board the ships before being released, and therefore they revert to type and are soon committing acts of piracy again. Also, should we not urgently put in place at least some assistance towards creating a judicial system that allows for sanctions to be imposed against these pirates?

Secondly, as has just been highlighted – and I do not share the opinion expressed just a moment ago – Operation Atalanta's role is essential. It is, in fact, the cornerstone of protecting and fighting against pirates and, personally, I am worried about the growing number of private companies that are ensuring the protection of these ships. What are these companies? Who is in charge of them? What exactly are their prerogatives? We have seen on several international stages that turning to these private companies can lead to serious abuse (abusive use of force, murder of civilians, and so on). Therefore, we must monitor them and limit their use as much as possible. What do you propose, Commissioner?

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). - Madam President, what a pity the European Union does not focus its comprehensive approach more effectively on some of the civil areas the Commissioner has described so well.

I am sorry to say that in regard to piracy, as in so many other areas, the European Union has confused its own institutional ambitions with practical reality, and I am referring here to naval operations.

Since 2008, NATO, using naval forces from North American and European allies, has been engaged in both counter-piracy and maritime counter-terrorism operations in the Red

Sea, the Indian Ocean and in the Gulf areas. But during its Presidency, France saw an opportunity to open a new chapter in EU defence policy and create a maritime dimension for the European Union. Operation Atalanta was born. And the upshot I have to say is costly confusion.

There are now at least three multinational naval operations as well as deployments from individual countries such as Russia, India, China and Japan. There have been some successes, but attacks have escalated and the risk of serious consequences for pirates, as the Commissioner has said, is still too low to outweigh the lucrative rewards.

In January 2012, 80 pirates were captured by counter-piracy forces in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean, 75% of these were captured by NATO ships, yet maintaining the political will and naval assets for NATO's operation Ocean Shield has been a challenge, particularly when more or less the same naval assets are being called on for an EU operation. The European Union should do something comprehensive on the civil side.

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

Georgios Koumoutsakos (PPE), *Blue-card question.* – (EL) Madam President, Mr Van Orden, I listened very carefully to what you said. You referred once again to efforts being made by the European Union to combat piracy, basically in order to tell us that the European Union should not have a common security and defence policy.

That would be a mistake and you know it would. On the question of piracy in particular, the first operation carried out – Operation Atalanta – was an EU operation; after a delay of several months, NATO followed suit. The first response was European and results were achieved.

I therefore think that you should clarify exactly what you wanted to say and what your message was.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), *Blue-card answer.* – Madam President, we have got to get our facts right here. There were NATO combined task groups operating in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean well before Atalanta was dreamed up. This was purely an initiative of the French Presidency acting out of Djibouti and that is what brought it all about.

What I am talking about is the way the European Union has military ambitions. It should leave military operations to those that know how to do it. We have a very good international alliance for that and it is called NATO.

One of the earlier speakers mentioned the lack of resources that are deployed. Well, no wonder there is a lack of resources because we have got the same navies producing ships for two different international naval operations. It is ridiculous. The European Union brings no additional naval assets to the table. It does not contribute anything additionally from a naval point of view.

So by all means. There is a lot to be done and even the European Union could do something useful if it focused its efforts on some of the civil activities which we have heard described this evening. But leave the military operations to those that know what they are doing. It is just going to waste money and overstretch our very depleted military forces.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President,, the absolute poverty and impoverishment of millions of people caused by capitalism in Africa, Asia and Latin America is being exploited by powerful international circles that are developing piracy as

a very profitable business activity that utilises highly frequented trade routes and is linked to the arms and drugs trade and prostitution rings.

The problem of piracy and armed robbery at sea has taken on huge proportions and claimed the lives of thousands of seafarers. What illustrates the change in the standard of piracy is the increase in the level of action by piracy gangs, because the objective today is not confined to robbing seafarers and stealing food or other items on board; it now extends to taking ships and crews hostage, selling the cargo and stealing booty worth millions of euro.

The concentration in the Horn of Africa and the area as a whole of powerful US, NATO and EU naval forces and naval forces from other countries, such as China, Russia and India, has nothing to do with fighting piracy. Piracy is being used as a pretext, within the framework of their more general geostrategic objectives, to consolidate their position, promote staff plans and control strategically important points in the area, such as the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Developments in the Persian Gulf, Israeli, UN and NATO aggression against Iran and preparations for another imperialist war will find a naval machine ready for war in the area which is being strengthened on the pretext of piracy. Ships and crews are already being sought to carry military equipment for major military operations by NATO in the Persian Gulf area.

The matter is further complicated by the decision by the governments of the Member States of the European Union to place armed guards on merchant vessels. This is creating a very dangerous situation that will have incalculable consequences, due to the threat which it harbours to human life at sea and the transportation by sea of raw materials and cargo.

The proposed solution is a no-win solution and it harbours risks to human life at sea, to seafarers and to the people in the area as a whole.

Michael Gahler (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, in respect of its main purpose, the EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta mission should so far be regarded as a success. After all, its main purpose is to protect the supply vessels of the World Food Programme as they deliver food to Somalia. So far, around 674 000 tonnes have been delivered. Not a single tonne of this food has been lost. To that extent, it has certainly achieved its main purpose.

However, this mission does, of course, have other objectives, which have been mentioned. In this connection, I believe it is right for us, as the European Union, to be present on the ground in the shape of this mission, as the fact is that, in this regard, the partners working in cooperation with the EU – that is Russia, China and India – find it easier to work with the EU than they do with NATO. We do not need to share this view – and I am sure that we do not share it – but it is nevertheless a fact. This added value provided by the EU is also something that we should utilise.

I also support the comprehensive approach that the Commissioner mentioned. After all, we have numerous measures on land, some of which are very creative. For example, we support projects in places where piracy does not occur, in Somaliland, that is to say, in the north-western part of the country. The Commissioner has been there. I think it is good that we are taking a pragmatic approach there and, in so doing, are ensuring that we stabilise the areas that are opposed to piracy.

I would have liked us to have been able to find out more about the money flows. You mentioned Europol and Interpol. Are you able yet to demonstrate successes in this regard,

where we are able to say that we have recovered some of the money so that we can determine how the pirates there are funding themselves?

Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, we should welcome the recent Council decisions on a global approach to piracy relating, firstly, to the appointment of a special representative for the Horn of Africa, which will support diplomatic action by the Union in the area, and secondly, to the new operational mission to extend action by the Atalanta mission and, thirdly, to the preparation of a new mission, within the framework of European defence and security policy, to support the development of capacities at local level.

However, it is important that we consider where we have gone wrong over recent years. On the operational side, we really must overcome the obstacles to the activation of the operational centre in Brussels, because that is the only way to guarantee central planning and better coordination between the various EU missions and activities. Also, we need to review the Athena mechanism to secure funding and increase the contribution to those missions. Finally, we need to resolve serious problems to do with timely information for forces on the ground.

At the same time, however, we need to examine the possible dangers inherent in operations on the Somali coast and focus more on the need to deal with the causes of piracy. As far as the causes are concerned, we all know that instability and poverty in Somalia have pushed simple citizens into this illegal activity. The solution cannot, under any circumstances, be a purely military solution. Alongside military action, we need to strengthen institutions and the rule of law and, most importantly, we need to step up efforts to combat the root causes of piracy, with emphasis on information and awareness-raising and, of course, on growth and job opportunities.

Phil Bennion (ALDE). - Madam President, the issue of maritime piracy is becoming more and more urgent. We see ransom negotiations not just taking longer, but record ransoms being demanded and the piracy itself becoming more and more violent.

Maritime safety is an absolutely fundamental issue for the European Union, and particularly for those nations like the UK, Greece and Spain which have significant shipping interests. However, the fight against piracy cannot and will not be won alone by military means. We need to promote peace and we need development and state-building in Somalia.

The EU is the biggest aid donor to Somalia. We should welcome a fresh approach based on land-based solutions, which would replace the income from piracy with that from economic development on land. I call on the Commission to tackle the lack of economic data that we have, so that the EU can focus its aid on the most relevant sectors. We know about the potential of the livestock and fisheries sector, but we need to look to other sectors.

I would also call for better cooperation with the Somalia diaspora, which has so far been ignored, but which plays a major role in supporting the Somali economy, particularly through remittances. It is suggested that these remittances could be as much as EUR 800 million every year.

From a local point of view, we have a large Somali community in my constituency in Birmingham. Therefore, I call on the Member States to strengthen their integration policy towards the Somali diaspora.

I welcome the progress that has been made with the Joint Financial Board, and I also agree that we need a short-term plan to protect our ships and protect our maritime transport and trade, whether that is through Atalanta, or through NATO, or through some form of better coordination between the two. This does not necessarily have to be just a short-term plan, as we also need a long-term plan.

Somalia remains one of the poorest countries in the world, where a quarter of the population rely on the World Food Programme. Now that we have this window of opportunity, with progress being made in reconciling the warring factions, we need to take advantage of the situation and move forward with development.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, it is obvious that the maritime piracy problem must be fought. However, the pretext of fighting maritime piracy must not, under any circumstances, be used to implement imperialistic plans for controlling international waters, geostrategically important regions, access to natural resources or their movement, as could be the danger in the Horn of Africa.

In the fight against maritime piracy, it is essential to fight the underlying causes associated with it, specifically fighting the poverty that the people of African countries suffer under the capitalist system, which has always used these countries for supplying the central countries with low-cost raw materials.

In this regard, it is necessary for there to be a genuine development policy that respects the sovereignty of these countries and people. It is necessary to reject the militarisation of the European Union and to show respect for international law, the United Nations Charter, the principles of sovereignty and non-interference, and the development of fairer and more equitable international economic relationships.

Carlo Fidanza (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I must note with regret the absence of Baroness Ashton from this debate. It would have been important for all of us to hear directly from her the latest updates on the situation involving the two Italian marines unjustly imprisoned in India after being arrested following the military operation against piracy in which they were involved. I am sorry not to be able to hear Baroness Ashton speak, and I hope that Mr Piebalgs's response will provide more precise details about the progress made in the last few days.

This is not just an Italian issue, it is very much a European issue, because – you see – the exclusive jurisdiction of the country flying the flag is a universally recognised principle of international law, and the Indian authorities having brought it into doubt risks undermining the very heart of the battle against piracy by the international community and the European Union itself, which, as we have said, is involved in the Atalanta mission. Therefore, I appeal to the EU institutions to make all possible diplomatic efforts to repatriate our soldiers, ensure international law is upheld and make sure that they are the subject of a fair and transparent investigation in their country of origin.

In addition, Madam President, I would like to comment on the many speeches I have heard from my fellow Members from the radical left. Frankly, I am convinced that Europe must be committed on a political and diplomatic level to help Somalia and all struggling countries to develop, but this cannot be a sufficient response to the hundreds of hostages and families waiting for their loved ones to come home, who are tired of talk and want practical solutions in the matter of international security.

Ricardo Cortés Lastra (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, all those present know that piracy on the high seas is a constant and growing threat to human life, safety and development, since it is a breeding ground for violence and political instability in Somalia and the Horn of Africa.

In figures, piracy in the Gulf of Aden in the last year resulted in more than a dozen deaths from 30 attacks, 200 captured pirates and nearly 200 hostages. This is an unprecedented situation that is affecting humanitarian aid for some six million people who need help due to drought and famine in the region; a humanitarian crisis that has already caused the deaths of thousands of people.

The amount of money that shipping companies are spending on security is 40 times greater than the aid given to Somalia by the European Union. Although we cannot underestimate the global effort being made through operations such as Atalanta and the operations instigated by NATO, more effort and more commitments are required. These efforts absolutely must include an anti-piracy strategy driven and supported by the leaders of Central and East Africa.

The fight against piracy has become a global issue that needs a joint and firm response, with a set of effective actions to also tackle the root causes of this phenomenon: youth unemployment, famine, drought and political instability. We cannot forget that, according to the United Nations, 40% of profits from piracy in Somalia have been used to finance local employment and have been invested in infrastructure for those most in need.

Finally, I call on the Commission and the Council to continue taking firm measures to tackle the root of the problem. Helping the Horn of Africa to end piracy, which is not only on the increase but is also becoming increasingly violent, must continue to be our priority.

Corien Wortmann-Kool (PPE). – (NL) Madam President, this is an important debate, as the piracy off the Somali coast – and, in fact, in a constantly increasing area of the Indian Ocean – is a very serious problem.

Time is pressing, as innocent crew members are becoming the victims of violence and facing unacceptable risks. Four hundred and fifty to 600 crew members are currently being held captive. In addition, I would also like to join our fellow Members from Italy in drawing attention to the plight of the Italian soldiers being held in India.

I value Europe's collaboration in order to deploy European naval vessels in the Atalanta mission, but we need to do more and make greater efforts to effectively combat piracy. The pirates are becoming ever more violent, and their arsenal is becoming ever more advanced. We therefore need to ensure that we pool all our knowledge in order to also tackle the pirates on land and dismantle their organisation there. We do have the knowledge to locate these pirates before they actually go out and attack ships.

Doing that requires political will and drive, and that is what I urge the Commission to provide. Train land-based Somali forces. Look into the options for targeted action. In the short term, also investigate whether special forces can be deployed in order to tackle the pirates in a very focused way.

This also involves investigating the flows of money and tracing and prosecuting all those who help siphon off the pirates' money. There is, you see, also an economic interest at stake here – that has been quite rightly pointed out already – and this is definitely also the case for the Netherlands, as a seafaring nation. Above all, however, we simply cannot allow

all these innocent crew members to continue to run such risks. That is why I would appreciate your attention to this issue.

Spyros Danellis (S&D) . – (EL) Madam President, the problem of Somali pirates starts on land, not on the water. As long as this country continues to be the world's most failed state, as the British Foreign Secretary recently called it, its young people will try to find ways and will find incentives to take to piracy.

However, our ships and their crews cannot be left to their fate until such time as the State of Somalia is restored. The reduced forces of EU NAVFOR are not up to the massive job delegated to them and the pirates arrested are not always brought before due judicial process.

Certain proposals have been tabled within the framework of the UN in terms of prosecuting pirates and are supported by the IMO. However, the lack of progress is prolonging the state of terrible insecurity of crews and shipping, while international trade and consumers are still shouldering most of the overall annual cost of piracy which, according to a recent study, is estimated to be close to USD 7 billion.

Dominique Vlasto (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, as has already been said, we are thinking of the victims of piracy and their families. This is a human tragedy, but it is also a problem which is jeopardising an activity – fishing – that is also an economic resource. This must spur us on to call for reinforcement in the fight against this sea piracy, for these attacks are the work of increasingly violent criminal organisations and they are happening more and more often. We must therefore urgently put in place a military framework and, in particular, a legal framework to combat this piracy and ensure the protection of the men and ships, all the while reflecting on how we can put a stop to these unacceptable acts and dismantle this savage piracy.

That is why I do not understand why Operation Atalanta's military resources have been reduced and why the Council vote on the extension of this operation has been postponed. I am therefore asking the Commission to urge Member States to efficiently increase this operation's resources as quickly as possible. We must also ensure that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is applied in order to put an end to widespread and unacceptable impunity.

Debora Serracchiani (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the issue of piracy is not a new one here, and was dealt with by this Parliament in the 2009 resolution. Everyone is aware of the events involving two Italian soldiers, who were arrested for causing the death of two Indian fishermen. In this regard, I welcome the assurances of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Baroness Ashton, who has said she has been monitoring the case closely in order to bring it to a positive conclusion, and that the incident should be put, to quote her words, 'into the broader context of international cooperation on counter-piracy and, more specifically, on the issue of regulating the protection aboard ships'.

However, the episode forces us to reflect on the fact that the phenomenon of piracy in the Indian Ocean or off the Somali coastline is still an extremely serious problem. As part of its defence and security policy, the EU launched the Atalanta mission in December 2008 and, in the last few days, its extension to 2014 was approved, but the number of ships involved has fallen dramatically, from 35 in 2009 to 10 in 2011. As we know, the EU intends to exercise greater coordination over the naval forces and military personnel on

board civilian ships belonging to Member States patrolling the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean.

Do we therefore feel that it is useful to establish common rules of engagement? Generally speaking, what other coordinated initiatives does the EU plan to adopt to protect merchant ships from attacks by pirates? In addition, what measures does it intend to take against third countries that fail to safeguard merchant ships crossing between the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean?

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE). – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, maritime piracy is an increasingly widespread and frequent occurrence today, and it is better organised, more profitable, audacious and violent. No vessel appears to be immune to it, from fishing boats and merchant vessels to yachts and cruise ships. There are 1 500 pirates operating off Somalia. People's safety and liberty are seriously imperilled, and all maritime and economic activities suffer significant losses, not to mention the costs of rescues, insurance, diversions from routes, chases, etc. In 2012 alone, 22 attacks have been recorded and, just in February, Somali pirates captured 17 vessels and took 251 hostages.

In 2009, the Commission organised an intervention at two levels: prevention, deterrence and repression, and also fighting the causes that lead to piracy. However, piracy remains, and is growing, which requires the measures adopted by the Commission and the Member States to be strengthened.

The Commission must extend its military action beyond 2012 and intensify its diplomatic action to obtain effective collaboration from the third countries in which the pirates take shelter. Member States have to engage both in criminal investigations, in particular, with regard to tracing money paid for ransoms, and legally, in particular, with regard to establishing conditions for putting pirates on trial.

Such concerted action by the Commission and Member States, as well as together with other countries and regions of the world, is urgently needed to restore the safety of the seas, which, in terms of fishing, affects both industrial fleets and small local vessels. The problem affects the European Union economy as well as the subsistence of local communities, aggravating their poverty and leading the population into piracy, in a continuously deepening cycle that has to be stopped once and for all.

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the international community is shedding crocodile tears, having abandoned Somalia to its fate for many years by giving up a strong military presence on the ground that would have helped prepare the conditions for governance that could have saved the country, which has now become a thorn in the side of the civilised world.

Also shedding crocodile tears are those who protest at the presence of military personnel on board merchant ships and, at the same time, fail to understand that without bringing force to bear, and therefore having the protection of the special forces and using targeted measures against pirates, we will not be able to achieve the result we hope for. Above all, however, the European Union could be shedding crocodile tears if we fail to bring home the Italian soldiers. There is a very simple reason for this: who will be prepared to deploy military personnel unless they can be tried by the correct jurisdiction according to the principles of internal law?

It will be the end of action against piracy if the Italian soldiers do not come home. At the very least, we need to save ourselves from the extreme confusion created, not by the High

Representative, but by some inaccurate spokespeople who continue to talk about private guards when, in fact, we are dealing with military personnel properly deployed in accordance with international law and in line with our legal principles.

Potito Salatto (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I will not join my Italian colleagues in asking the EU to intervene to protect the two Italian soldiers because I believe that this should instead be the duty of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy as it concerns two European citizens of Italian origin.

Unless, in this Chamber and our institutions, we do not make the cultural shift that will require the High Representative for Foreign Affairs to take care of our citizens, especially when international rules have been flouted – the most basic of which is that a ship in international waters is subject to the jurisdiction of the flag it is flying – we will never manage to give Parliament a significant role at international level. This would cause serious damage and continue to leave foreign policy to be implemented by individual Member States, rather than creating the supranational state of Europe that citizens are crying out for.

I was amazed when Baroness Ashton initially replied to calls for explanations from Italian fellow Members by saying that, ‘We did not receive any requests from the Italian Government’. Moreover, this evening, you, Commissioner, also introduced the issue saying ‘We are acting at the request of the Italians’. This is the wrong cultural and political approach. We are a great nation, a great continent, and we have to take care of our European citizens regardless of their nationality wherever they are, taking action to safeguard them in accordance with international law. I hope that sooner or later, Baroness Ashton will be capable of making this cultural shift.

Catch-the-eye procedure

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) Madam President, in recent years, several Romanian sailors have been captured by Somali pirates. Last October, three of them were fortunately released after eight months of captivity. Piracy should be tackled by the EU in terms of both its causes and impact on security in the region.

Europe needs to change its strategy on Somalia’s political and economic construction by cooperating with the African Union. Efforts must be accompanied by an efficient distribution of humanitarian aid. In parallel, efforts to combat attacks by sea must be centralised. Thus, parallel missions of the EU, China and the US are currently taking place in the coastal area. The military protection of the international transit corridor in the Gulf of Aden should also be prioritised within such a structure.

Barbara Matera (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the problem of maritime piracy is by now well-known, and the sad events involving the two Italian soldiers once again highlights a lack of collaboration between the institutions. If the two riflemen made a mistake in the course of their duties while combating piracy on behalf of Italy, then they will pay, but they will have to be tried by the Italian courts as enshrined in the Treaty of Montego Bay. To this end, I call on the Commission to take practical action to ensure that international law is respected. At the moment, there are two European citizens waiting to understand whether the institutions that represent them will be capable of guaranteeing the rights that Europe talk so much about.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this seems like a film from the past. We had thought that by now, piracy was something that only related

to the Internet and issues concerning copyright and similar issues, instead of which, piracy is precisely what we know about from books and films of adventure. Obviously, the modern incarnation involves boarding a ship with machine guns and rocket launchers, not scimitars, and quite honestly, my left-wing friends, it has nothing to do with class war.

It is irresponsible to claim that pirates exist because of capitalist exploitation. There are no justifications for attacking, stealing and killing – and to say so means to be complicit in such crimes. It is a tragic problem, and it is even more tragic when the people protecting the ships in accordance with international law are arrested by the authorities of other countries duplicitously in clear violation of international law, as was the case recently with the two Italian soldiers in India, or rather in international waters, who were then taken to harbour in India.

I would like to thank the Commissioner for the comments made this evening in the Chamber, also because I hope that protecting the law is truly one of the EU's main priorities.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE). – *(IT)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, two Italian citizens, Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone, are currently under arrest in India. Today, the Italian Defence Minister told us that these soldiers and the ship on which they were serving were brought into port by deceit, having been told there were pirates in the port. Then, once the ship had entered the port, they were forcibly taken off the ship and the two soldiers only disembarked in order to avoid further bloodshed.

In the face of such a tale, we want to ask a straightforward question: 'What is Europe doing about it? Where is Baroness Ashton, and why is she not here today telling us what is happening?'. If her care and attention to the issue are reflected by her absence from the Chamber, then this is very worrying.

Mr Piebalgs, you are here representing Baroness Ashton, so please tell her to come and tell us what action she is taking in this regard as soon as possible, or if and when she returns to this Chamber, she will be welcomed with the politeness and courtesy she will deserve. Parliament sends its strongest and most sincere best wishes to the two Italian marines arrested in India and their families who are suffering hours of worry in Italy.

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D). – *(PL)* Madam President, I would like to express my regret that, unfortunately, counter-piracy measures are not producing the expected results. The statistics show that the number of attacks on merchant ships now comes to several hundred per year, and the pirates are still holding over 450 people hostage. Up till now, an important role in the fight against the pirates has been played by the EU and its Operation Atalanta. This is, unfortunately, changing for the worse. The number of vessels taking part in counter-piracy operations is falling drastically. In 2009, 35 vessels were still part of these operations, while in 2011, there were only 10, and now there are only three. In other words, the EU must not appeal to others; it must itself make much greater and more specific efforts in the fight against piracy.

Licia Ronzulli (PPE). – *(IT)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, we decided to wear these T-shirts to maintain a high level of awareness and to ask the European Union to make a concrete commitment that will be able to successfully resolve the issue of the two Italian soldiers arrested in India. Only by combining forces can we retain hope in the liberation and repatriation of our soldiers. Europe took action unjustifiably late. It is once again absurd to have to note the absence of Baroness Ashton, the person in charge of foreign policy, from this debate. This is yet another demonstration of insensitivity, and here I would like

to mention the Lampedusa affair as well, in taking effective and shared decisions rapidly at times of diplomatic crisis.

Andris Piebalgs, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, that was a very emotional debate.

The accusation that the EU is not supporting the repatriation of the two Italian servicemen is a false accusation. I would mention just a couple of the steps it has taken. The EU has made approaches to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, to the Indian chargé d'affaires in Brussels, and to the Indian Deputy National Security Advisor, and that is not all. Baroness Ashton is fully committed to doing everything we can do from the EU side, but there is no magic wand solution. However, we are fully committed and we will take full care of the issue.

On Atalanta, this has actually been much more successful than was said; the number of ships in the hands of pirates has been reduced from 20 to eight. While there is still concern over around 200 hostages, there are sufficient resources for this year at least, and good coordination.

On the Somalia strategy, it is true that for 20 years, there has not been sufficient international involvement, but the EU alone does not hold the magic key to solving Somalia's problems.

First of all, Somalia needs legitimate representatives, and today we have the transitional institutions. They are the only institutions we have in that country, and we should support them because of this.

Second, we support – and I mentioned the figures – the security operations. It is not easy to fight Al-Shabaab. Now, the number of African troops that are risking their lives, and taking quite heavy casualties – many soldiers from Burundi and Uganda have lost their lives fighting Al-Shabaab and preserving security – has increased to 17 000, so that might make a difference. However, the fact that a blast was reported at the presidential palace in Mogadishu today shows that the fight to ensure security is not an easy one.

We have made quite substantial investments in development and humanitarian aid – I have mentioned the figures – and it is true that we are doing more in Somaliland and in Puntland, where the security situation is better. However, it would not be true to say that we are not doing everything in our power. We are actually using all the financial resources that the Member States are prepared to give us.

On international shipping, we need the IMO. The IMO has responded to the call we made to it by organising a conference on how to protect merchant shipping. That conference will be held in May.

I could go on and on, but my point is that we need to find a solution to the security situation in Somalia and its political development. This is what is needed. The accusations that the EU provoked the crisis are ridiculous. We have not provoked the crisis. We are trying to resolve the crisis, as far as this is in our powers. By the way, last year, there was only one EU vessel taken in Somali waters.

This is a lot about alliances. The EU is doing its full share. We are engaging with our international partners. It is very important to understand that the EU's efforts alone cannot provide a lasting solution to this issue. We need other members of the international community, and the bigger countries, to become fully involved. Only then will we be able to find, step by step, lasting solutions to fully eradicating piracy.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during a future part-session.

Written statements (Rule 149)

John Attard-Montalto (S&D), *in writing.* – Too much has happened in addressing the serious problem of maritime piracy. The most conspicuous area where it is present is in the Indian Ocean. The main pirates come from Puntland, North Somalia. I have always believed that the only way to break this criminal activity is to make it economically not profitable. Indeed, maritime piracy is organised very much like a business venture, with shares taken up by investors who pass on the strategic information to the pirates who are in possession of state-of-the-art technologies. Patrolling such a huge area by navies has had an impact, but the piracy still exists. It has also spread to other areas like the Gulf of Guinea. Today, we are seeing more and more ships being protected by armed guards, the entire ship perimeter defended by razor wire. Gradually, tankers and merchant ships are being turned into sea fortresses. The problem, however, is to turn failed states like Somalia into nations respectful of international law. The UN is not even able to safeguard Mogadishu and therefore, it should delegate the task to those powers that are able and willing to use force to restore the rule of law.

19. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

20. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting closed at 21.10)