Europe and Crisis Management. The Involvement of Parliaments.

Chaired by Mr. Bernard Accoyer, President of the French National Assembly

The sitting was opened at 3.05p.m.

President Bernard Accoyer. I am delighted to welcome you to the Chamber of the Palais Bourbon which has for close on two hundred years hosted the plenary sittings of the National Assembly.

2008 and the first few weeks of 2009 have witnessed in quick succession, the Russo-Georgian conflict, the explosion of violence in Gaza and the gas crisis. The financial and economic crisis has deepened and the environmental crisis, which puts the future of our planet at stake, is still unresolved. Rarely has Europe had to face such serious difficulties all at the same time. They all represent challenges to be met by the European Union but they are also an opportunity for the Union to reaffirm its role on the world stage. Indeed rarely has the Union shown such a political capability to effectively contribute to the search for solutions to such crises.

We also welcome the mediation role played by the European Union in the gas crisis of January 2009 through the precious initiative taken by the Czech presidency. Even so, this crisis reminded us of the absolute necessity of strengthening our security in the energy field. The European Union has heard this warning and the parliamentary assemblies must actively participate in the planning of our common energy policy at a time when discussions are on-going on short-term measures (the preparation of urgent regional plans to complete the national plans already drawn up and the strengthening of warning mechanisms) and a long-term strategy is also being worked out in accordance with the principles set down at the “Energy” Council last week.

European citizens also expect their states to act in a coordinated and effective manner to face up to the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and to find a solution to the structural dysfunctions which brought this situation about. Through its sheer size, the crisis risks having an effect on all the policies of the Union by making decision-making more difficult and by putting the social cohesion of European countries to the test. To face up to this crisis, the European Union has undertaken, within its borders, substantial legislative work which aims at strengthening the financial regulation system and the European Council of December 2008 drew up the basis of a European recovery plan. The next European summits must follow this road. On a world scale, the European Union must now show that it can provide proposals for solutions and defend them with a single voice and must use its influence to introduce its values into the new international financial system.

It is clearly not for Parliaments to act in the place of Governments but in these circumstances, the national Parliaments and the European Parliament have the obligation to
inform citizens, to monitor Government action and to put forward proposals to which their
democratic legitimacy will lend weight and meaning.

We will, first of all, deal with the involvement of Parliaments in the management
of crises by the European Union. Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European
parliament will open the debate.

Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament. It is indeed a
great honour for me to take the floor before the National Assembly of the French Republic
and I thank you, Mr. President, for having made this possible. I will continue now in German.

As my former colleague and current Vice President of the European Commission, Mr.
Antonio Tajani, will deal with the present economic and financial challenges, I will limit
myself to highlighting what I consider to be our two main priorities: firstly, maintaining with
all our strength the internal market and the stability of the single currency whilst refusing all
forms of protectionism which would only worsen the crisis and secondly never forgetting that
the European model is not capitalism, and thus one should not speak, as far as we are
concerned, of “reforming capitalism”, but rather is the social market economy, as we are
reminded in the Treaty of Lisbon.

I will centre my speech on external policy and the way in which the European
Parliament can wield its influence in this area. This influence should always be applied in
such a way as to highlight the European principles of the preservation of the right for every
person to live in dignity, the respect of the rights of man, peace, freedom, solidarity and the
principle of subsidiarity. This implies, first of all, our own common political vision in order to
avoid crises. Already, thirty-six delegations of the European Parliament are in contact with the
Parliaments of non-member states of the European Union. The European Parliament also has
influence in the Joint Parliamentary Assembly ACP-EU, in the Euro-Mediterranean
Parliamentary Assembly and in the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly. A
parliamentary assembly associating the European Parliament and the non-member countries
of Eastern Europe will be set up after the European elections.

In the field of external policy, the main challenge at the moment is the situation in
the Middle East. On July 13, 2008, during the French presidency which was particularly well
led by President Sarkozy, we set up, following on from the Barcelona Process, the Union for
the Mediterranean. The Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the EMPA, already
existed, as did the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of the Islamic Conference
Member States. After the beginning of the war in Gaza, the latter decided to freeze relations
with the EMPA and with the Union for the Mediterranean. Mr. Abdel Hadi Al-Majali,
President of the Jordanian Parliament and Mr. Mustapha Mansouri, President of the Moroccan
Parliament, who are both moderate personalities, made it known that if a solution leading to a
lasting peace in the Middle East were not found, the relations between the Arab world and the
West would become very difficult.

In my position as President of the EMPA, I led a delegation of the European
Parliament to the Middle East. We visited Cairo, Gaza, Ramallah and Jerusalem as well as
Sderot, an Israeli town against which Hamas regularly launches rockets, and finally Amman. I
held discussions with Israeli authorities as well as with Mr. Netanyahu. I strongly wish the
Conference to make a forceful declaration on the situation in the Gaza Strip. The people of
Gaza expect us to make their voices heard and they want the peace process to continue with
the new Israeli Government.

I would like the Quartet on the Middle East, which gathers, as we know,
representatives of the UN, the European Union, Russia and the United States, to show its full
support for the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state, co-
habiting with the state of Israel in peace and in security within the internationally recognized borders of 1967. If we do not reach such a settlement, there is a risk that the Arab world will turn more and more towards fundamentalism and that the governments of moderate Arab countries will find themselves in growing difficulties.

We must do all we can to relaunch the peace process and to enable the establishment of two viable states; so that the Gaza Strip may become accessible for international aid; so that the conference on reconstruction which is due to take place at Charm El Cheikh may be successful; so that Hamas may no longer be provided with rockets to bombard Israeli territory.

I would never have imagined that one day I would speak in this Chamber. In the Middle East, I was called an idealist when I said that peace was possible. I reminded the doubters that peace finally became a possibility between Germany and France even though they harboured a hereditary mutual enmity. Why would what was possible in Europe not be possible in the Middle East? We Europeans must encourage a return to peace by using our experience of reconciliation and democracy for the good of the rest of the world and particularly at the present time for the Middle East. *(Loud applause)*

**Mr. Antonio Tajani, Vice President of the European Commission.** It is an honour for me to participate in this Conference which brings together the speakers of national Parliaments and the President of the European Parliament. From 2005 on, Mr. José Manuel Barroso began the *rapprochement*, which was unanimously welcomed, between the European Commission and national Parliaments. In May 2006 a structured political dialogue was introduced. It has indeed been a success if one is to judge by the 406 considered opinions addressed so far to the Commission by thirty-one parliamentary assemblies from twenty-four member states. For the fifth year in a row, a member of the Commission has been invited to take the floor before you. I will fulfil this role with great pleasure and as a replacement for Mr. Barroso who is otherwise engaged and begs to be excused, I will provide the Commission’s point of view on the management of the economic and financial crisis which is currently hitting the Union with such force.

I would, at the outset, like to highlight the active involvement of the Commission in the management of this crisis and underline that this issue, which is a highly political one, calls for a resolute attitude and coordinated action by all European institutions and notably by the parliamentary assemblies.

I will take advantage of the opportunity granted by the French National Assembly, in the respect of multilingualism, our common wealth, to speak in my native language and thus I shall continue in Italian.

The least that can be said is that the economic situation does not lead one to excessive optimism. Nonetheless, a timorous response would be a serious mistake. We will not reply in an effective way to the challenge which faces us if we remain on the defensive. We must play an attacking and not a defensive game! And it is essential that we must present a united front – falling back on protectionism would be a serious mistake. As a former parliamentarian, I am convinced that the Strasbourg Assembly and the national Parliaments are the perfect places for discussion and decision-making; the Treaty of Lisbon, which I hope will be ratified as quickly as possible, will provide them with an increased role.

The crisis means we must mobilize all our strengths in order to act together. In this respect, the European Council which will meet on March 19, will enable us to set down new measures. In the meantime, we welcome the fact that the heads of state and of government of the European countries who were present at the G20 meeting in Berlin on
February 22, were able to find a common approach in preparation for the summit set for London on April 2.

The globalization of our economy requires the definition of a new model of international economic governance; the European Commission considers that the European Parliament and national Parliaments have a great role to play in this field. They proved this during the parliamentary meeting set up jointly by the European Parliament and the Czech Parliament last February 16-17. The Parliaments of the European Union, gathered in Brussels, underlined the necessity of a strong European leadership which could find expression in coordinated actions. They declared themselves against protectionism and economic nationalism and in favour of the maintenance of the Euro and an active European Central Bank. The Commission, which shares this point of view, is already working to transform it into action. In fact even if the crisis is a test for the European Union, it is also an opportunity for it to debate its vision of society and the economy, as well as its own organization. We must review the international economic rules in force, as well as their means of application and monitoring, but we must also once more put human and social factors at the very heart of our economic system.

It must be noted that the rapid and determined reaction of the European Union to the crisis, enabled the collapse of the financial system to be avoided. So that the European banking system may once more take up its function as dispenser of credit to citizens and companies with equitable conditions, the financial establishments must be relieved of the “toxic” assets which they have accumulated, as well as of their over-valued holdings. Thus two days ago the European Commission adopted guidelines in this direction which aim at guaranteeing that such movements will take place in a uniform manner so as to avoid any competitive distortion between the credit establishments.

Beyond this, our fundamental objective is much more ambitious: the aim is to reform the financial sector so that it may recover its natural role at the service of the real economy and thus of growth and employment. After the implementation in November 2008 of a 200-billion-euro economic recovery plan (to attempt to break the vicious circle in which job losses and a fall in demand feed each other), we proposed specific measures for the automobile industry and I will make proposals to the Commission concerning the transport sector. At the European Council on March 19, the Commission will present to the heads of state and government, proposals for initiatives based on the conclusions of the Working Group on European Economic Governance whose chairmanship was given by Mr. Barroso to Mr. de Larosière.

The solutions cannot be exactly the same for all member states as their situations differ but such solutions must be applied in a coordinated way so as to obtain the best possible result and to maintain the coherence of the internal market. We must mobilize all the instruments we have available (common policies, European funds, economic reforms and monetary policy) so as to reach the desired objective which is, need I remind you, to protect European citizens from the harmful consequences of the crisis. The Commission has thus welcomed very favourably the initiative of the current presidency of the Council to call an extraordinary summit in May which would be given over to the social aspects of the crisis. This summit will deal with the safeguarding of employment through professional training and requalification, with the improvement of the functioning of the labour market and with the access of young people to this market.

Finally, it is essential to increase the speed of reform which is proposed in the Lisbon Strategy. To do this, it will be necessary to invest considerably in the fields of the improvement of energy efficiency, infrastructures, innovation, clean technologies, research
and training. We must bank on innovation to guarantee sustainable growth and strengthen our investment in infrastructures as they are the pillars of growth. In these two fields, the transport sector has a vital role to play.

The fact that the sky appears quite cloudy should not lead us to be overly pessimistic. The European Union has shown its ability to react to the crisis quickly and with determination. It has been able to propose solutions by creating a common framework for action which respects the diversity of situations in the member states and has been able to convince its partners in the G20 of the need for a global response to the crisis. I say this with particular conviction to the President of the European Parliament: European institutions must close ranks and work in unison. We must absolutely avoid the crisis having the effect of delegitimizing the entire European construction; this danger is all the greater given that we are on the eve of elections to the European Parliament. However national Parliaments have also a decisive role to play so that within our common framework, each country can map out the route which is best suited to its own situation.

I will conclude by reiterating both my confidence and my optimism in the European Union. Thanks to its resources, to the peoples which make it up and to the democratic strength which its Parliaments symbolize, the Union is in a position to overcome the great challenge which it must face. We should remember the words of Winston Churchill: “A pessimist see difficulties in each opportunity, an optimist see an opportunity to be seized in every difficulty”. We have indeed a huge opportunity to seize. (Applause)

**Mr. Miroslav Vlček, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.** Even though the bank bail-out has already cost billions of dollars, the financial and economic crisis is continuing to worsen. Industrial production is declining, the construction sector has been seriously affected and the unemployment rate continues to increase. This all leads us to believe that the recession will be the longest and deepest which our generation has ever known. However this episode is also symptomatic of a crisis in politics. It has become clear that the political objectives are often merely short-term and that they are based more on power games than on a real response to the needs of the citizens. One of the consequences of the crisis will be that poverty will strike a greater number of social categories; the risk is that such a development could lead to the growth of xenophobic and nationalistic tendencies within the European Union to the detriment of democracy and the social market economy.

To face up to such challenges, the European Union must remain united and continue its integration. It is in this context that the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic approved the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon. Nothing could be more dangerous in fact than irresponsible demonstrations of individualism. The Union does not need more regulation but better regulation. It must stabilize its financial institutions and encourage demand and no member state can, alone, stand up to the crisis.

Apart from the fact that we must fight together, we must also strengthen collaboration between the European Parliament and national Parliaments. Allow me to come back, on this subject, to the conclusions of the two working groups set up at the last parliamentary meeting organized jointly by the European Parliament and the Czech Parliament last February 16-17. One of these groups dealt with the strengthening of the Union’s competitiveness and the other with the means necessary to bring about a Europe with a social dimension. Both groups affirmed that European executives concentrate their efforts on the banking sector and on certain key industries such as the automobile industry. However we must support small and medium sized firms by facilitating their access to public markets and also to financing by means of the European Investment Bank. We must also, to this end,
improve the efficiency of European structural funds. However the crisis that we are going through is also a crisis of confidence and a crisis of values which only total European solidarity will enable us to overcome. In addition, the joint inter-parliamentary meeting underlined the need to strengthen solidarity with those in the most vulnerable positions. Training manpower, developing skills, encouraging continuous training are all key measures for the future, as are massive investments in research, the reinforcement of productivity and the deepening of the Lisbon Strategy through which the Union provided itself with an industrial policy.

The crisis tests our capacity to react, but it is also an opportunity to innovate. Every state which acts alone in dealing with the crisis, will be weak but a united European Union can face up to it successfully. Our twenty-seven states represent together, the strongest grouping of states in the world; we must know how to use this strength and we should seize the opportunity provided today to the Parliaments to make propositions.

We are also faced with numerous crises which could degenerate into armed conflicts. Traditional diplomacy is attempting to solve these crises but it must be supported by parliamentary diplomacy. Parliamentary diplomacy is a form of diplomacy which can say things without mincing its words, which can clearly highlight problems and which can, especially, negotiate with NGOs, some of which often represent important parties in the conflicts. In addition, parliamentary diplomacy is more easily understood by peoples than classical diplomacy which is traditionally more discrete; it can encourage the transformation of truces into lasting peace.

In Gaza, a fragile truce has been set up but it risks being broken at any moment as none of the underlying problems has been solved. The resistance to occupation continues, as does the fear of terrorism and missiles. Parliamentary diplomacy must actively support the efforts which would lead to the re-launching of the peace process aiming at the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state, at peace with the state of Israel completely safe within its 1967 borders, modified, if necessary, by exchanges of territory. I welcome the fact that a dialogue on this subject has been set up in the region by members of the national Parliaments and by members of the European Parliament and in particular by the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly under the chairmanship of Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering.

For myself, I recently sent you a ten-point draft memorandum. In it, I underline the need to encourage dialogue between the parties to the conflict and with the other countries in the region. I also stress the need to lend support to better coordination between the initiatives of the Quartet and those of the Arab League. However what must be given priority is dialogue between the Palestinian parties. I discussed this question with President Abbas who reiterated his desire to form a Government of national union which could organize general elections. I am thus very pleased that both Fatah and Hamas have agreed on this principle and that this has created favourable conditions for negotiation. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas greatly appreciated the role played by European parliamentary diplomacy and he wishes the draft memorandum to be adopted and put into effect.

We, the representatives of European Parliaments, must continue the dialogue with the Parliaments of all the countries party to the conflict, without exception. Through the economic and humanitarian aid which it provides, the European Union has an excellent reputation in the region. It must use this reputation to strengthen its diplomatic role and to contribute to a political solution to the conflict. I hope that the Conference will approve the measures proposed in the draft memorandum: the opening-up of the borders, the raising of the siege of Gaza, the cessation of armed attacks on Israel, the end of arms trafficking and the
deployment of European troops at the checkpoint at Rafah. We also underline that the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council on January 8, 2009 and by the European Parliament on January 15, 2009, will create a framework favourable to the discussion of the other problems in the region, including settlements and access to water.

Considering that no political objective can be reached using violence against defenceless civilians, the Czech presidency condemns all forms of terrorism, emanating, be it from an individual or a state. Only dialogue can lead to a long-term political agreement. I thus call upon the Conference to adopt as its own, the propositions contained in the draft memorandum. The Czech presidency also proposes the sending of a delegation representing the Conference, to the region. The mission of such a delegation would be to work along with the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly for the application of the measures contained in the draft memorandum. (Applause)

Mr. Per Westerberg, President of the Swedish Parliament – It is indeed a great pleasure for me to take the floor in this Chamber and I would like to thank my hosts for the quality of their welcome.

Nine months have elapsed since we met in Lisbon and during those months many problems have arisen. The financial crisis has brought about political crises which have even led to certain governments resigning. In addition, everyone still has the war in Gaza clearly in their mind, as well as the interruption in gas supply in mid-winter and the armed conflict in Georgia.

From an economic point of view, it seems to me that the European Union and its member states have, up until now, handled the crisis quite well, through the stabilization of credit and the adoption of common measures. The Union has few legislative powers in this field but it does represent a useful space for discussion. The French presidency carried out its term with efficiency, the Czech presidency has taken on the baton with brio and Sweden who will then follow, will do its best to continue in this direction.

In 2009, the crisis will reach its full size: millions of jobs are threatened, public deficits will rocket, the risk of social conflicts will increase. And the worst is yet to come. This will certainly put pressure on our national political systems and even on the Union itself. The way in which we deal with this crisis will set the tone for European cooperation for many years to come.

Experience has shown that it is traditional in such extraordinary circumstances to fall back upon oneself in order to solve one’s own problems. Everyone can understand that governments and national Parliaments, in times of crisis, above all look after the protection of their own country’s interests and the well-being of their own citizens. However, history shows us that if we play the national card too much as regards economic matters, we run the risk of protectionism and even populism and nationalism. Of course, unilateral policies can, at times, be well adapted but we must be wary of any measure which taken in spite of the rules of the internal market, would have merely the result of moving the problem from one country to another.

Like the development of free exchange on a world scale, the common market, the very heart of European cooperation, has been the essential condition of our prosperity for fifty years. It contributes to peace and stability. Today many people consider that is an accomplished fact but it is nonetheless the fruit of arduous work carried out by several generations of political leaders over many decades and to reach their goal they had to move national interests down to a lower position. These are the principles which must guide our
future action. If we were to turn away from this fact, the whole European edifice would be plunged into a crisis next to which the current crisis would pale by comparison.

In Europe, public financial support has been called for in certain industrial sectors and the frequency of such calls will certainly increase as the crisis continues to worsen. Governments and Parliaments must meet this challenge. In fact, each Government of a member state which wishes to support such and such a sector or company is not only submitted to the rules of the internal market but also to the requirements of globalization. Our economies are more and more linked and complex; it is difficult to know what purpose exactly our support measures serve. Thus what exactly does “national responsibility” actually mean? Let us examine the Saab example: Saab is owned by General Motors which set up its Headquarters in Sweden but its assembly lines are spread out between Sweden, Germany and Mexico. This is truly a good example of cooperation!

Of course, it is essentially to governments that the responsibility of managing the crisis falls. Nonetheless, the Parliaments must play a vital role and in exceptional circumstances, they must monitor the action of the executive power. They must also be able to taken the necessary decisions as quickly as possible. We often hear complaints about the slowness of work in the Riksdagen, the Swedish Parliament, but we act according to our needs: thus, as regards the financial markets stability plan, our Parliament, entirely mobilized, beat all speed records!

It goes without saying that speed is not everything. Parliaments must also gather public support for Government action, especially in times of crisis when difficult measures are necessary. Transparency and time for dialogue are essential for political action. It is in involving all the interested parties and by strengthening cooperation between Governments and Parliaments that we will manage to gain the support of public opinion, that we will avoid the economic crisis becoming a political crisis and that we will take sustainable measures.

During this financial crisis, the committees of the Swedish Parliament have interviewed many ministers, experts and representatives of various sectors of the economy and the debates, which are public, have often been broadcast on national television. Similarly, within the Committee for European Affairs, the Finance Ministers present, at monthly meetings, the questions which will be dealt with by the Ecofin Council. As of the month of March they will be interviewed by the parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance before every meeting of the Ecofin Council.

In order to better meet the challenges which await us, an exchange of our respective experiences is essential. We must strengthen the role of Parliaments and inter-parliamentary cooperation. In times of crisis we must create a united front and remain united for example by means of inter-parliamentary forums.

As regards the propositions of our Czech colleagues concerning the crisis in Gaza, I, of course, recognize that we are dealing with a major crisis but I am in disagreement on one point: each speaker/president plays a different constitutional role. In Sweden, for example, the Parliament over which I preside, has explored several avenues in an attempt to solve the Gaza crisis; having said that, the Speaker of the Parliament cannot quote or represent everyone! (Applause)
President Bernard Accoyer – I would now like to open the debate for which eighteen speakers are enrolled. Each speaker will have two minutes thirty seconds; I would be very grateful if you would strictly respect the time limits so that each of you may have the possibility of speaking. I would just like to make it clear that each speaker will now speak in the microphones placed around the Chamber.

Mr. Gianfranco Fini, President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies – Mr. Tajani, Vice President of the Commission and Mr. Pöttering, President of the European Parliament have, through their speeches, brought an important contribution to our debate. I will attempt not to fall into the trap of repetition and I will try to propose a new light on the extra dimension which Parliaments can bring in the struggle against the crisis.

Our assemblies are by definition varied; like Mr. Westerberg, I would have great difficulty in summing up the position of all the members of my assembly as regards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And for good reason: our assemblies represent the plurality of our societies even if there is a majority which provides the Government with its legitimacy. But, as the Treaty of Lisbon states, it is the role of Parliaments to provide an extra democratic dimension.

Governments attempt to solve crises; Parliaments try to do the same thing, in their own way. Thus, a Government might consider that its action could bring a satisfactory response to a crisis; it is up to Parliament then, bringing together as it does, a plurality of opinions, to tell things as they are to public opinion. We must tell our fellow citizens that today we are going through the first ever planet-wide crisis in the history of humanity. We Europeans have indeed already met quite a few crises but this is the first time ever that no region of the world has managed to escape such a crisis. We must say it and say it straight that this is no ordinary crisis but a crisis without precedent and no one knows how we will come out of it. Once this crisis is over, nothing will ever be the same again.

The only solution to a planet-wide crisis is a planet-wide response: every country in the world will place its brick in the wall of the solution. In these circumstances the role of Parliaments is carry out a mature reflection on the cause of the crisis. Mr. Pöttering referred to the social market economy: if the economy is too interwoven with finance, this can lead to disastrous social consequences. The economy is above all about satisfying demand and not about speculation, investment in the stock exchange or enrichment through pulling financial strings. That is the European social model!

This economic crisis which has social consequences is at the convergence of three major problems: insecurity linked to global immigration, terrorism and the crisis in energy. Consequently it goes without saying that no national Parliament can go it alone; it is up to all the European cultures together to meet this challenge in unison with our allies from the other side of the Atlantic. (Applause).

Mr. Blaz Kavčič, President of the National Council of Slovenia – The crisis which was first of all financial, then became economic and subsequently social and even moral. It can only be overcome by long-term measures.
What share of the blame at the origin of this crisis can be apportioned to globalization? Developed economies have been marked by a decrease in the number of employees and the repercussions have struck quite a few other countries like China for example. Economic globalization has an impact in the social and environmental fields. In this context, the costs are met by the financial contributors of the Union, i.e. private individuals, whilst the profits go to large-scale multi-nationals. Consequently, the fundamental question to which we must reply is that concerning the fair sharing of the profits of this world-scale order. (Applause).

Mr. Herman De Croo, Vice President of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium – Two things strike me. First of all, the crisis came as a surprise. Some people claim to have seen it coming but no one really anticipated its full force. Secondly, this crisis requires us all to be humble. The state, despite its limits, set itself to dealing with the most urgent matters first through subsidies and guarantees. The banks are, of course, the oxygen of our economy but another priority is represented by labour-intensive sectors such as the automobile industry. In addition, there is a great temptation to look for scapegoats and to carry out numerous legal or political inquiries, even confusing the two areas – I myself am rapporteur of the committee which deals with the bank crisis.

In the end, we do not really have a systematic response to the crisis. Yet its consequences could be appalling: it could lead to negativism or nationalism among voters but it could also bring protectionism and a preference for short-term fixes even though its effects are global. The fact of remaining humble faced with this crisis, our inability to react, should force us to adopt a stance based on solidarity – even if it is slightly artificial given that we all have to be aware of our respective electorates. As we are careful about justifying our political existence, we have difficulty in accepting that the causes of and the solutions to, this crisis are beyond our capabilities. However for us, becoming aware of how limited our means are, and how modest our efforts can be, is perhaps even more important than understanding the ills themselves. (Applause).

Mr. Javier Rojo, President of the Spanish Senate – Faced with the huge economic fracture of globalization, we must meet a financial crisis whose endpoint remains unknown to us all. European and American leaders, as well as those of emerging countries, have set out to rescue the financial system and to guarantee its viability and in so doing to guarantee the savings of its citizens.

We have for too long been exposed to the risk posed by those who do not respect the popular will. Democracy has undergone the threat of its own extinction! We must reestablish democracy and link it to the essential preoccupations of its citizens. So as to guarantee prosperity we must grant the market a new role and adapt its rules so that they provide more responsibility. Such is our task as we are the representatives of the will of the people.

Parliaments must require Governments not to stop replying to national needs whilst they strengthen international cooperation at the same time. No country can go it alone. To do this, we must work within the framework of supranational institutions and we must make effective rules for us all so that the market may develop in full transparency, equity and justice. Otherwise inequalities will grow, unemployment will increase and the social consequences will be appalling – hunger and undernourishment could strike millions of people. It is up to us to defend the dignity of the lives of our fellow citizens!
But rhetoric is not enough. We must say it clearly to our citizens that their representatives are determined to carry out their spirit of initiative. No, the catastrophes to come are not inevitable! Let us recognize that so far we have not provided a good example. What is the European Union doing, what are the economic and political institutions doing? Has the moment not now come for us to cooperate through common policies, to assert our union, our identity, our social cohesion – in short, our state of well-being?

European citizens will soon vote to renew their Parliament. If we are not capable of proposing a strong and integrated Europe which can dialogue with the world, we will encourage euro-scepticism and will discredit our institutions. This is where our responsibility lies! (Applause)

M. John O'Donoghue, Speaker of the National Assembly of Ireland – This morning we referred to the breaking of the link between the European electorate and its institutions. This is a fact: today Europe must meet many great challenges which affect the daily lives of its citizens. These challenges are an opportunity to be seized.

Certainly there is a growing number of financial difficulties, both for the citizens and for the state, and Europe is often called upon to solve these problems. It is naturally impossible for Europe to satisfy all these demands in a cut-and-dried manner but it is capable of reacting to this crisis. In this context the European economic recovery plan is very significant. In Ireland, paradoxically, it has led to reflection, even introspection, on our conception of what Europe is. Ireland adopted the Euro: it saw sustainable economic growth and often called on Europe to make its contribution. The Irish people have understood this and I am confident concerning the result of the vote which will take place next October – without at the same time resting on my laurels.

Let us avoid protectionism and let us protect the single market! It is essential that Europe makes its presence and its action felt in the Balkans, in the Near East or in any other area of conflict. In the past, replying to Mr. Churchill who told him that in his country, things were serious but not desperate, Mr. De Valera, said the following: “In our country, things are desperate but certainly not serious”! (Laughter and applause)

(Mr. Gérard Larcher, President of the Senate, replaces M. Bernard ACCOYER in the President’s chair)

Chairmanship of Mr. Gérard LARCHER

Mrs. Ene Ergma, President of the Estonian Parliament – The best way for Estonia to deal with the crisis is to present a favourable environment to companies, including in the fiscal field, whilst at the same time strengthening the efficiency of the public sector. On February 20, last, our Parliament passed a budget which reduces public sector spending by 10%. Our priority is the adoption of the Euro; the measures which we are taking in that direction remain, unfortunately, limited.

At the same time we are supporting companies which export. Similarly, investments made on the basis of the structural funds have seen significant growth. Estonian banks have stood up quite well in the crisis; thanks to capitalization their financial situation remains quite stable. Everything must be done in order to maintain this financial stability. Estonia, which supports the efforts of the Commission aiming at implementing the political
commitments of the G20, decided last November not to adopt any protectionist measures in the following twelve months.

Europe is strong when it acts in a united way. The time has certainly come for us to concentrate the Union’s action more on innovation which will breathe new life into its economy. (Applause).

Mrs. Katalin Szili, President of the National Assembly of Hungary – I have noticed that the speeches appear to be more questions than statements. And with good reason: the question of what to do concerning an economic and financial crisis with such social and economic consequences is indeed a legitimate one. On the one hand, we must attempt to limit the damage it causes, whether that be by maintaining jobs or protecting companies threatened with collapse. On the other hand, we must avoid the worsening of the social crisis – to this effect, tomorrow we will discuss Europe for the year 2030.

In such a context, the role of Parliaments consists above all in the monitoring of Government action. We must also demonstrate our solidarity both on the national level as well as on an international scale. Everyone knows that the crisis is not hitting each country in the same way. The countries which have only been part of the Union for five years are suffering more from the crisis, as it represents the second economic regression they have undergone since the change of political regime.

Cooperation is essential both with the banks and with the different sectors of the economy. In this area Parliaments have a role to play. Finally, we must also ensure that our decisions are genuinely applied in practice and must not accept that they remain merely theoretical (Applause).

Mrs. Gerdi Verbeet, President of the Chamber of Representatives of the Netherlands – This recession is not the first that we have known but we must go back to the 1980s to find one of a similar seriousness. At that time I was a teacher: every year, I had to tell my students that, in spite of their efforts, two thirds of them would not find work.

In the present crisis, we must take into account the political and economic changes which have taken place since then. We live in a more interdependent world. Europe’s role in that world has changed; the enlargement of the Union and the creation of the Euro have turned Europe into the world’s largest economy, placing us in second position as regards the world’s currencies. We share interests but also responsibilities.

We must always bear in mind that none of our countries is big enough to go it alone. Even when it comes to protecting one’s markets and jobs, it is never desirable to ignore one’s neighbours. On the contrary, it is together that we must face the challenges of today. Thus, we need to reform economic supervision within the Union as the Larosière Report suggests and we must introduce a new system for the management of monetary flows, so as to provide a new boost to the European economy in the context of the recovery plan. The Commission and the presidency of the Council have already closely studied these questions but the decisions must be taken without delay – whilst at the same time being careful to avoid any form of democratic deficit.

In my country, the Government has decided several times, from one day to the next, to inject substantial sums of money into the re-launching of large financial institutions.
These sums are taken from taxpayers’ funds and thus we must very carefully examine the choices which are made in the taxpayer’s name. This is the role of Parliament; it must be respected. The responsibility of making sure that such discussions take place falls upon the shoulders of the presidents of national Parliaments. (Applause)

**Mr. Gundars Daudze, President of the Latvian Diet** – The crises of the 21st century are more complex than in the past and so no longer stop at the borders which previously held them up. Transnational management of crises is essential for the Union: it is by seeking common solutions that we can raise the confidence our citizens have in the European project.

Latvia has suffered badly from the crisis. At the end of last year, the Government recognized that our economic growth, which had been fast over several years, had come to a halt. Structural problems added to the global crisis pushed Latvia to call upon its foreign partners and in this respect, I want to thank all the member states of the Union who supported the Commission’s proposition to grant us their financial support, as well as all those who helped in a bilateral framework.

In response to the crisis, the Latvian Parliament had to engage a fast legislative process; in a very short time, we amended the budget and adopted a special economic stabilization programme. Today we are undergoing substantial budgetary cuts, strong social pressure and the discontent of the population. Times are hard, especially for us, the political leaders, whose duty it is to act.

Even though we sincerely value the solidarity of which we have been the beneficiary, we must note that the crisis has revealed certain of our weaknesses: decisions taken in one country can have an effect upon another. We must therefore give particular importance to the coordination of our decisions – a process in which national Parliaments must be involved.

Every crisis opens up new avenues and forces us to mobilize in order to correct our mistakes and find new, creative solutions. During times of crisis, a society turns towards its leaders. In the areas of peace and stability, the Union has already proved itself. This project came to fruition because of courageous leaders who had a vision; today, it is our turn to act, so that this project may live and maintain the well-being of our citizens!

**Mr. Sauli Niinistö, President of the Finnish Parliament.** No one can say when the crisis and the recession will come to an end, or how we can solve it. Let us, nonetheless, try to be optimistic: once we have touched the bottom, we must begin to climb again. We are in the midst of what economists call “creative destruction”. Our economies are able to reinvent themselves and to be reborn from their ashes just like the Phoenix.

I would like to come back on two questions.

The first concerns borrowing and debt. Everywhere in the world, Governments have borrowed enormous sums of money: 50 billion Euros per week, according to estimates. Is this a real stimulus or, on the contrary, a kind of “drip” aiming at avoiding “bubbles”? Are we not moving too far away from the real economy? Local government budgets cannot possibly follow. At the beginning of the 1990s, Finland had the worst recession of all the OECD countries. It took us two years to come out of it but three times longer for the public sector, to the extent that we have had to continue to borrow during this whole period. In fact it
was 20% of the Finnish population, those who found themselves jobless from one day to the next, who suffered for all the others.

Second point: as regards debt, we need better protection than that provided on the financial markets. In the United States, we are told, the quantity of dollars in circulation is increased and in China, they play on the exchange rate. If this is true, then it means that others are picking up the bill. What solution can the European Union bring? In my opinion, our cooperation must be strong and forceful in such a way that others do not have to pay for the situation. We are, indeed, national Parliaments but we need to show great flexibility in the coming ten years. (Applause)

Mr. Pavol Paška, President of the Slovak National Council. My speech will deal with the notions of protectionism which must be rejected and solidarity which must be developed. The Slovak economy which is completely open and centered on cooperation with our European partners is still in full growth. This is why these two ideas are so essential for us.

Certain experts recommend “magic” solutions: divide the European Union and save the nation-states, close down the national economies (such ideas often come from the larger economies), or even return to our former currencies. Even in the case where such an idea were acceptable from an economic point of view, it is totally unacceptable from a political standpoint.

Those of us who represent new member states and former countries of the communist bloc, have worked hard throughout the integration process to persuade our populations of the necessity of Europe as the only road to prosperity. It would be unimaginable for us now to defend the protectionist solution before our voters. “I’m terribly sorry”, I would have to tell them, “but I got it wrong. It was only an experiment! Forget free trade, free movement, Schengen…yes, we transferred to the Euro two months ago but let’s now go back to the Slovak Crown!”

The closure of borders and of economies is not the right solution. This conference must send a clear message: only solidarity and strengthened cooperation between the member states can get us out of this crisis and back onto the road of prosperity. (Applause)

Mr. Thor Pedersen, President of the People’s Assembly of Denmark. During the current crisis we must be careful about predicting the future. Of course, the economy has always known good and bad periods, the latter being the consequence of bad decisions. The only way to pull through, is to adopt new measures which take into consideration the unusual and global nature of this crisis. Today everyone sells to, buys from, lends to and borrows from everyone else. Countries are interdependent. The dollar depends on China buying American bonds etc.

Thus we have to set aside all forms of protectionism. We must solve this crisis together. What is more, this crisis will only last as long as our peoples believe that the situation will get worse. The turning point will come the day the consumers dare once more to buy new houses, new cars etc.

In Denmark, not everyone has been struck by the crisis. Civil servants, for example, have seen their salaries increase whilst, at the same time, the cost of living has decreased. Nonetheless, spending has not yet resumed as people believe that prices will decrease even further. It is thus our responsibility to make sure that the money held in households comes back on the market and to invest in the areas which produce results in the long term, such as infrastructure and transport. (Applause)
**Mr. Armand De Decker, President of the Belgian Senate.** We are currently going through what is probably the first great crisis of globalization. For the moment, the responses that we are providing are mainly of a national nature and aim at saving the essentials in the short term. We know however that the real response can only be global and, as far as we are concerned, European. Faced with the great emerging countries, the solution will be put forward through legislation and global regulation.

We often talk of the situation as if the worst were already behind us. I, for my part, fear that it may yet be ahead of us. If that were to be the case, then the solidarity, about which we have all spoken here, must be implemented very quickly. The European Union has already put forward propositions, particularly through the group chaired by Mr. Jacques de La Rosière, to better regulate the financial system and to give it the ethical code which it has so lacked. Speculating with virtual money is not producing; it is not participating in an active economy; it is playing and taking risks with the rest of the world.

We must therefore put more energy into European efforts and also think about the global response. Of course, the International Monetary Fund should intervene to regulate the financial system but I also ask you to consider the situation in the third world. The World Bank estimates the investment necessary to allow these countries to participate in the economic recovery at 2,000 billion dollars. If we do not carry out such investment, we will probably be faced with the greatest ever migrant flow in the history of humanity.

In this context, I wish to emphasize the very specific role the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations could play in finding formulae which might associate the economies of the countries of the South with the recovery of the global economy. *(Applause)*

**Mr. Georgi Pirinski, President of the Bulgarian National Assembly.** Like Mrs. Szili, I believe that, for a large number of central and eastern European countries, the crisis is double. The crisis due to the transition had very similar effects to those of the current crisis on the old member states: massive unemployment, substantial fall in income, very painful restructuring, huge fall in the standard of living. If we were able to implement reforms at that time, it was because the populations imagined there would be subsequent improvements. And now they are victims of this new crisis.

May I also take this opportunity, my dear colleagues, to ask you to firmly recommend to your respective Governments to re-launch the infrastructural programmes which have recently been somewhat sidelined because of a lack of financing. It is essential that the banks implement such financing. I am in particular thinking about the crucial Gazoduc programme which links the Black Sea to the Mediterranean via Bulgaria.

It is also necessary that the structural and cohesion funds be accessible and that they be put to the best use possible.

We often hear of more regulation, of more intervention; certainly, but let’s be careful about respecting the proper balance and not damaging the market in general and the single market in particular. *(Applause)*

**Mr. Bogdan Borusewicz, President of the Polish Senate.** We know when the crisis began but we do not know when it will come to an end. It is difficult to predict what will be the outcome. Nonetheless, we must tell our voters the truth: the crisis will hit everyone and there is no miraculous solution. It is not by increasing the budget deficit and public debt that we will solve the crisis. Look at Ukraine where this type of measure was used. The gas conflict is only postponed as the country does not have the money to pay.
Economic events may have repercussions at other levels. For some, protectionism is the best response to the crisis. Many of our voters believe this to be the case. However, we all know that it is not the right solution, in fact quite the contrary: it would be extremely dangerous for the European Union. Having said that, the economic crisis will, unfortunately, lead to a social crisis.

However, there may also be positive effects. The European Union and even the Euro may see a resurgence in their popularity. Today we have the opportunity of replying to the question which all our citizens are asking us: why do we need the European Union? It is quite clear that we need it so that we can act with solidarity in difficult situations. (Applause)

Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. Not to have included the topic of the crisis on our agenda would have been extraordinary. Having said that, we are neither the Council of Ministers for Foreign Affairs nor that of Ministers of Finance. As my Swedish and Italian colleagues have both noted, the speakers of Parliaments are not, constitutionally, political leaders.

In addition, we represent very different opinions between which there can be extremely wide gaps. We must therefore be very careful. Debating is one thing but envisaging intervention is altogether another. If we decide upon an intervention in Gaza then why not do the same in Zimbabwe or in Afghanistan? There are many crises in the world and we would open ourselves to criticism if we were to choose but one of them.

As regards the financial crisis, the solidarity of which we have spoken represents an important message. However, I am not sure I have heard any solutions proposed here – indeed were we to suddenly come up with a formula to solve the crisis, our place should be in the Finance Ministry! The most we could say upon returning home, would be that our conference envisaged such and such a solution which seemed interesting and that it underlined the considerable role that Europe must play. (Applause)

Mr. Trajko Veljanovski, President of the Assembly of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is an extreme privilege but also a great responsibility to take the floor here today in the homeland of Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet, the founding fathers of a united Europe. Today’s European Union is, in fact, the response to one of the most terrifying conflicts our continent and our whole civilization has ever known.

In the Republic of Macedonia, although the crisis has but lightly hit the banking and financial sector, it has had significant repercussions on daily life and the Parliament has actively participated in the search for solutions.

At the beginning of this century, the Republic of Macedonia was faced with one of the greatest crises of our recent past; a conflict based on ethnic questions which we have managed to go beyond, thanks to the framework agreement, worked out with the help of the international community but also with the determination of the people of the Republic of Macedonia, which sought tolerant cohabitation between people with differences. Indeed it is precisely with the signing of this agreement that the role and the responsibility of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia begins, in the constitutional implementation and the practical application of said agreement. Believe me, this process was not simple and it is indeed on-going, but today, the framework agreement is an operational model for a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-confessional and above all else, democratic state for the Republic of Macedonia. The principles of this agreement are now part of our daily lives. They also represent the proof of our determination for the future generations. I am also persuaded that this agreement is an operational model which could inspire other states in the field of cohabitation and inter-ethnic democracy.
Through its values, laws and provisions, the European Union, to which NATO must be added, is the second decisive factor for strengthening homogeneity within Macedonian society. We are aware of the duties we must fulfill as regards our membership. From this point of view, the role of the Macedonian Parliament has been confirmed on a daily basis and in a transparent way, before our national public opinion but also before the international community. We are even more aware of our responsibility as our region is still fragile. It is for this reason that our Parliament grants particular attention to regional cooperation.

A united Europe cannot be built in one fell swoop. It will be constructed by means of concrete achievements and above all, through the creation of solidarity supported by action: this was already the thought expressed by the great Robert Schuman in 1950.

The citizens of Macedonia now hope for the ending of the visa system as they have already made much progress in this area. Please allow me, in this regard, to conclude with a quotation from another great European and great friend, the European commissioner, Olli Rehn: “Restrictive borders limit our minds, chain our action and reduce our influence: expansive borders free our minds, stimulate our action and strengthen our influence”. Through what they have already accomplished, the Republic of Macedonia and the citizens of Macedonia deserve that today. (Applause)

Mr. Harald Reisenberger, President of the Austrian Federal Council. The economic crisis which all our countries are going through is also a crisis of confidence. On account of the interdependence of economies, the only solution can be a common solution. No country can consider that everything is absolutely fine if only its own national economy is working: our economies are inextricably linked. In a group like Opel for example, decisions will have repercussions on many other companies as well as many other countries.

We must, in particular, keep an eye on those who continue to take advantage of the crisis. It is a duty for us to have a very precise idea of what is happening.

The question of who is responsible for the crisis will remain without an answer. However what is certain is that it is not the employees of our countries. Not only must we protect them but we must also ensure their promotion. Certain people are surprised that civil servants’ salaries are going up. It is however important that employees gain increases and that, despite the crisis, their work be correctly paid.

In the framework of the European Union, we must reflect upon the criteria which we have set ourselves, as the situation is a new one. Unemployment creates insecurity, insecurity creates poverty and poverty creates instability. Our aim is exactly the opposite: work for all, as well as security, prosperity and stability. (Applause)

Mr. Arūnas Valinskas, President of the Lithuanian Diet. Many international crises hold our attention: Gaza, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia etc. However one cannot be satisfied with just talking: we must move from talk to action and find political solidarity.

Having said that, I must agree with my British colleague: if we had the miracle cure to the economic crisis, we would not be speakers of national Parliaments but ministers of finance. We know the starting point of the crisis but we do not know where the finishing line is.

Certain countries have larger populations than others but the European Union is our common home. When the house is on fire quick action must be taken. In my opinion, we have not used all the instruments which we have at our disposal. Why would one buy a new
musical instrument if one is not yet capable of playing the old one. Let us try to learn how to play the old instrument before even thinking about buying a new one!

I thus call for political solidarity. Protectionism is the worst of all threats as, by definition, it is introduced to the disadvantage of our partners.

President Gérard Larcher. Thank you to all the speakers.

I have noted two main ideas in your speeches: firstly, no to protectionism and secondly, the importance of solidarity. It is only by working together that we will manage to overcome a crisis whose consequences, we must remember, spread into emerging and developing countries.

The preparation of the parliamentary dimension of the presidency of the European Union

Report by Mrs. Katalin Szili,
President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Hungary

President Gérard Larcher. I remind you that before 1989 there were no meetings between the national Parliaments of the Union. Then came the COSAC which was followed by the development of joint meetings in Brussels, gathering the European Parliament and the Parliament of the country holding the presidency. Last November’s such meeting, my dear President Pötering, enabled us to reach a happy conclusion on the “energy-climate package”.

President Szili, I will now give you the floor to present your report. We will be even more attentive to your words as Hungary will hold the presidency of the Union in the first semester 2011.

Mrs Katalin Szili, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Hungary. My dear colleagues, the document which we have drawn up is around forty pages and is at your disposal. Thus my presentation will be brief.

At the outset, we sent each Parliament of the Union, a questionnaire dealing with eighty-four points and divided into three sections: firstly, questions on the political role of Parliaments; secondly, questions on their technical role and finally questions aimed at setting down what could be a “model” in the field.

We have spoken much today about the strengthening of the role of Parliaments. In this respect, the Treaty of Lisbon would be precious in allowing us to take on our responsibilities.

In any case, the time has come to write a kind of ‘handbook’ for national Parliaments both in the field of their relations with Government and the area of inter-parliamentary cooperation. Our monitoring missions include the monitoring of the preparation of the presidency of the European Union. All the replies which we received and for which I thank you, my dear colleagues, emphasize the vital role that we can play.

Generally speaking, Parliaments set up a group of between fifteen and twenty members to prepare the presidency of the Union. In bicameral systems, the two chambers work in close cooperation. I note with pleasure that the standing committees accept to become involved in the preparatory meetings.
Of the main problems of a practical nature, we should mention that of simultaneous translation. I think that the language policy adopted by the COSAC could be applied to the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments.

In addition, the preparatory work of Slovenia to arrive at a consensus to enable it to carry out the presidency may be cited as an example.

My dear colleagues, I ask you to ensure that this report has a follow-up by sending me your remarks and observations. We intend to have it published on the IPEX site but also to have a manual published for the use of Parliaments during the period of their presidency of the European Union. (Applause)

**M. Herman De Croo, Vice President of the Chamber of Representatives of Belgium.** I wish to thank Mrs. Szili for this report to which all Parliaments have contributed. It is indeed a real sign of the positive development of the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments which must find its own way between the COSAC and the European Parliament.

**President Gérard Larcher.** We all agree entirely with the sentiment behind these thanks.

**Announcement by the President of the Polish Diet**

**M. Bronisław Komorowski, President of the Polish Diet.** As Poland prepares to hold the presidency of the European Union in the second semester of 2011, we must not forget an important anniversary, especially for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In June 1989, Solidaroc won the general elections in Poland. This event was a prelude to the fall of the Berlin Wall and to the reunification of the European continent. I invite you thus, my dear colleagues, to come to Warsaw next June 1-2 to celebrate this anniversary.

**President Gérard Larcher.** Thank you for this invitation, Mr. President and for the symbol which it represents.

We shall now make go on to the Elysée Palace where we will be received by the President of the French Republic.

*The sitting was closed at five twenty-five p.m.*
The Future of Europe for the Year 2030

Chaired by Mr. Bernard Accoyer, President of the French National Assembly
and Mr. Gérard Larcher, President of the French Senate

The sitting was opened at nine a.m.

President Bernard Accoyer. President, speakers, dear colleagues, we are here to debate the future of Europe for the year 2020-2030. The European Council of December 14, 2007 set up an independent working group whose remit was to identify the fundamental questions which Europe is liable to face in the next twenty years and to study the responses to those questions. The group was given the task of deciding the best way to establish the stability and prosperity of Europe and its surrounding region, without going into the details of institutional and financial questions. The group will submit its report to the European Council in June 2010. I salute the importance of this work as, more than ever, we need to revive a collective project which can garner the support of our fellow citizens for European construction.

I encourage the members of the group to ask all the questions which concern our future: the durability of the European model of social cohesion in the 21st century; the essential issue of sustainable energy; protection against the widespread threats of terrorism and organized crime; demographic needs and the challenges arising from conflict zones on the edges of the Union. The very basis of our identity will thus be at the heart of this reflection from which, I have no doubt, we have much to gain.

National Parliaments have a very specific role to play in this framework: first of all, of course, according to the letter of the treaties, since the Treaty of Lisbon provides us with the mission of participating in the conventions which will, from now on, deal with the preparation of the revision of treaties, but also according to the spirit of our new mission, which makes us a precious stepping stone between the peoples of Europe. It is for this reason that we propose to you, my dear colleagues, to debate at this moment on this essential topic.

Mr. Bruno Le Maire, Secretary of State in Charge of European Affairs. Presidents, speakers, President of the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, it is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today to debate on the future of Europe for the year 2030.

France worked very hard in 2007, upon the initiative of the President of the Republic, for the setting-up of the working group, now referred to as the “Gonzalez Group”, which has the remit of reflecting on the future of the Union. In these uncertain times such an initiative is particularly relevant and our expectations concerning this group are even higher.

My deep conviction is that the European Union is going though, during this economic and financial crisis, a decisive stage in its history. When every day brings its share of new announcements and new resolutions, you need a reliable compass, a clear direction
and a precise idea of the road to follow. This is the challenge which the reflection group must help us to meet.

We need, as quickly as possible, the institutions which are set out in the Treaty of Lisbon. Without the Treaty of Lisbon, there are no stable institutions and without stable institutions, there is no future for Europe! In this regard, the recent vote of the Czech Parliament sent a very positive signal which we all welcome.

Coming back to the crisis, I want to say that the choices our nations will make will be decisive for Europe which is hesitating today between an everyman-for-himself attitude and an approach involving solidarity for a common destiny. There is a great temptation to fall back on oneself and for protectionism. But these reflexes are dangerous and they must be driven back by the European institutions, governments and the Parliaments of member states. Criticizing the behaviour of each other is useless during a time of crisis: dialogue must win out over stigmatization. In order to reassure and convince our fellow citizens we must propose a new direction for Europe and accept that one cycle in the construction of Europe has come to an end. This was a cycle of shared prosperity during which the spirit of competition between member states was emphasized. After the crisis the world will never be the same again.

The Union has the legitimacy and the courage to propose a model for the future. It now needs to create the means by providing itself with new instruments. In order to show that it is the only efficient solution to the crisis, Europe must have clearly worked out for itself the economic model, as well as the model for society and values which it intends to defend over the coming decades.

I have three convictions regarding this subject.

Firstly, after our bad habits of the past, it is absolutely essential to introduce efficient regulation and monitoring of all the financial players. The encouraging results of the February 22 meeting in Berlin prove the desire of Europeans to have influence at the London G20 summit. The alternative is simple: either we arrive united, with strong positions on hedge funds, supervision and tax havens and we will make ourselves heard or we arrive divided and we will carry no weight in front of the United States and the other world powers. Let us recognize that we have our own interests which are not necessarily the same as our American friends. The European Union must be in the vanguard of the fight against tax havens and for the regulation of hedge funds, the assessment of credit rating agencies, the capping of pay in the financial sector and the strengthening of supervision bodies.

These are the expectations of our fellow citizens and we must be equal to the task.

France and Germany have played a vital role in gaining these early results and they are committed to continuing this fight without fail with all of their partners. These are not technical discussions, for what is at stake here is no less than the definition of the European economic system that we want: regulated, sustainable, responsible entrepreneurial capitalism at the service of a dynamic, innovative economy.

Secondly, our industrial policy must become a great ambition for the Union. The crisis has shown the limits of the notion of competitiveness when used alone. The Lisbon Strategy was useful but it is now out-of-date. Close cooperation, joint investment between member states and collective strategies are now what is necessary to enable European industry to come out of this crisis stronger. No national industry will manage this alone.

To gain in competitiveness, we have a decisive advantage over other regions: the internal market. We have a great strength: our capability to innovate. We also have a decisive
asset: the quality of our workforce. Let us understand together how we can use them better! A European industrial policy of cooperation and sustainability is the promise of new growth. This will be the only efficient strategy for controlling public debt.

To overcome the crisis, we have made the only possible choice: recovery through public spending. But this will be at the price of massive public debt in all European countries. In a few years time, the problem which we will have to solve will be that of the reduction of public debt. In order to do this there will be no other possibility than through innovation, research and a collective industrial policy aimed at regaining substantial growth rates.

Thirdly, the idea of solidarity must return to the heart of European construction. Crisis tends to sharpen selfishness. However, we have need of solidarity: as regards those member states, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe, who are suffering today from the financial and banking crisis; within member states themselves and within nations in order to fight against all forms of poverty and to reduce inequalities. The reduction of inequalities is one of the founding values of Europe and we must remain fundamentally attached to it. On this difficult subject, the French presidency initiated a common step by proposing to set quantified national targets for the reduction of poverty. It is through collective responses to this challenge of social cohesion that we will remain faithful to a common conception among all Europeans of what living together in Europe actually means.

Presidents and speakers, the crisis forces us to think about the future of Europe with new ideas. We have a duty to reflect and use our imagination. Your parliamentary institutions and the reflection group must play a major role in this task by bringing the sensibility which each member state has. No state holds the truth alone. The future of Europe depends on the exchanges between each of the states of which it is composed. It will come out stronger from the tests it is currently going through only if the members of the European family which you represent, can come together to move forward with a common ambition. (Applause.)

Mr. Felipe González, Chairman of the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe. I would, first of all, like to thank the President of the French National Assembly for his invitation.

I will begin my speech with a series of warnings.

As the reflection group has just begun its work, I can only speak today in my own name. I have always been a convinced European and, with this crisis, that is even more the case. If the European Union did not exist, we would have to invent it. The crisis we are going through is global but the instruments we are using to combat it are local. Even the United States admits that it cannot solve the international crisis by going it alone: the situation has changed.

Just after the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, we decided to set up a reflection group on the future of Europe. However since then, we have had a succession of bad news. The first piece of bad news is that, in order to obtain results, we should have begun to implement deep structural reforms quite a while ago. We must set a course and take away the bottlenecks which stop us from progressing.

The Treaty of Lisbon has had its ups and downs, but as the reflection group’s remit does not include institutional problems, let us suppose that the treaty has entered into effect.
Between the European Councils of 2007 and 2008, the crisis turned out to be of an unprecedented nature and its effects have been destructive on the internal market. The institutional crisis is coupled with a financial and economic crisis.

The threats which hang over European security come from other sources than international terrorism and organized crime – the Georgian crisis and the deployment of the antimissile shield, without mentioning the break in gas supplies for certain European countries, have proved that. Security thus appears as an integrated concept within which the notion of borders seems ineffective. It is for this reason that we must propose joint responses.

The crisis we are going through is systemic but there is no alternative to the capitalist system. No one any longer believes in communism and utopias lead to regression rather than progress. On account of its global nature, the crisis underlines the contradiction between the local and national framework of democracy and sovereignty on the one hand and a more internationalized and interdependent economy on the other.

Ten years ago already, I noted in a report that, taking into account the characteristics of the financial system, each epidemic which appeared here and there could be transformed inexorably into a pandemic: in 1998, the Asian crisis spread to Turkey, Russia and Brazil before reaching the central markets with the bursting of the dotcom bubble. Mr. Le Maire is right: we have no other solution than to find a form of global governance for a globalized financial system.

To give substance to the concept of a European Union, being united is not enough: we must also reach agreement with the others. At a time when President Obama is putting an end to American unilateralism, we cannot, for our part, any longer act without the United States: no one can contain the crisis alone.

Provisional losses are estimated at 60,000 billion dollars, i.e. four times the GDP of the United States but we have not really understood certain phenomena. Whilst the world economy was growing at the very satisfactory rate of 4.5% per annum, financial movements progressed 60%. Why was there such a gap? Why were we not concerned? The funds which should have financed future projects were being used to create empty financial instruments: derivatives and structured products and their underlying about which we know nothing because of a lack of monitoring and accountancy.

I am a member of a left-wing clan in which being the advocate of the market economy is no easy task. I then defended that the market did not suffice and that there had to be the possibility of intervention in the economy. However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, politicians believed in the invisible hand of the economy and were taken back by the strength of the shock of 2008. Now the markets are asking us to deal with the problem but it is just like in football: we need training. We must also, at all cost, avoid hyper-regulation, which will not solve the problems of the international financial institutions. I am like Don Quichotte who, five hundred years ago, advised Sancho Panza, the new Governor, to be pragmatic. Instead of setting down rules wholesale, those which are adopted must be respected. The system has need of coherence above all: there cannot be American regulation, Asian regulation and European regulation. The G20 must guarantee the transparency of movements of capital so as to better deal with them.

The situation is serious. Last spring we were surprised by the sudden jump in oil prices – we reached 147 dollars per barrel. At the same time, capital was transferred onto the futures markets where purchases went from 70 billion to 280 billion dollars in two and a half months. Prohibiting such operations would hinder the freedom and the dynamism of the economic players, but it is irresponsible to rely on deposits of 5%. Those who buy rice or
energy should put down 60% of the amount of the transaction – at this level the financial institutions would run no risk, considering the size of the variation in rates – to contain speculation which is the cause of inflation.

Let us now move to Europe’s priorities for the period 2020-2030. They have not changed but the crisis, whose full effects we have not yet grasped, will oblige us to carry out structural reforms which did not appear essential to strengthen the necessary cooperation. National initiatives cannot take advantage of the synergy which is gained from the cooperation of twenty-seven countries. In this respect, the crisis can also be an opportunity.

The reflection group has one advantage over the other bodies of the Union: it has much greater liberty of speech because it does not depend on any vote. Thus, Europeans are proud of their model as the best in the world as regards social cohesion. This is true and we are told that to reach our goal we must refocus the Lisbon Agenda. But it did not work. Was the aim of Lisbon not to make the European Union the first economic and technological power in the world for 2000-2010? But far from having progressed, we regressed, and all that before 2007. The gap with the United States widened, never mind our position by comparison with China and India. If we decide to make social cohesion a matter of civilization, then we must ask ourselves the question; how to finance it with an economy which creates no value through innovation and which is losing in global competitiveness?

There is also a crisis in social cohesion on account of developments in our demographics. The population pyramid was reversed with a drop in the active categories. Migratory flows enabled us to offset certain problems and to preserve social cohesion. We cannot disassociate the social dimension from the economic dimension, especially with the external crisis which is hitting us. We will never be able to compete with countries with very low labour costs. The extra dimension which we possess must be used to gain an advantage in competitiveness. The objectives of Lisbon must be reviewed because, even if the diagnosis was right, was the treatment correct? One of our priorities must be to solve this problem of global competitiveness in order to guarantee social cohesion and this is even more the case given that the shortcomings of the system, such as unemployment, will not be corrected if we lose competitiveness. And this will be difficult in the current national situations.

In conclusion, I would set down three priorities.

First of all, we need a new social pact for the 21st century such as that which the signatories of the Treaty of Rome agreed upon. That agreement was a virtuous model because, at that time, we were able to give work to everyone, as well as to export, and finance solidarity, but that was clearly in the past.

My second priority is energy and climate change. The suspension of Russian gas deliveries to Ukraine which led to the break in supply to several European countries, is worrying. In fact, if Europe does not shake with cold when two or three of its members, no matter how small, shiver, then there is no Europe. The European Union must act as a union.

The Soviet Union was a disastrous regime but its elders would never have imagined not respecting a contract. The leaders of modern-day Russia are unpredictable – it is not in fact the first time that they have closed the pipelines – and Europe cannot accept to be at their mercy.

In the same way, with the drop in oil prices, the temptation is very strong to go into reverse in our search for alternative energies and to postpone the “20-20 by 2020” idea until later. This would be a huge mistake as the moment the world economy regains a growth rate of 3%, the energy crisis will recommence.
Why shouldn’t we debate about nuclear energy, whether we are for or against? Certain countries refuse it whilst others develop it. The Union will no longer be able to continue to pretend that this is not a real issue in the difficult context of our insufficiency in independent energy and of our environmental tensions. It is therefore important to debate this question! Certain countries may take advantage of the Union’s silence to postpone their anti-global warming programmes by twenty-five years. Even if we should strictly apply the principle of subsidiarity, it is essential that Europe moves towards a common energy policy. If the European Union does not take advantage of the synergy provided by the internal market, of the technological revolution and of the interconnection between energy networks, it will not reach the objectives it has set itself and will not respect the commitments it has made.

My third priority: migratory flows. Immigration is seen as both a need and a threat. Within the Schengen Area, it is not possible to have national policies which are based on the logic of a state’s own borders and on bilateral agreements with the countries of emigration except for matters concerning the process of integration for immigrants. Without an overall policy, we will never manage to regulate the flows. It is not possible to have different laws coexist within a common zone.

The organized crime and international terrorism which threaten us do not recognize any borders. To protect ourselves, we need transnational legal and policing instruments. At the present, our responses to these threats are totally uncoordinated. Certain countries plan on giving more power to central authorities but bureaucracy is not the solution!

In all these areas, we need to look at things differently.

All this should lead us to ask the following question: what foreign policy do we need?

The return of France to the military structure of NATO led to an irrational debate because this return is not harmful to the functioning of NATO, nor to the foreign and defence policy that we need. There is no contradiction between the two since, in fact, France and Great Britain have defence policies which are mutually coherent.

Europe has more than 1.5 million soldiers, 90% of whom are deployed in territorial defence. This is out-of-date. 100,000 of them, at least, would need to be ready to intervene elsewhere. Not all countries would necessarily be called upon to make up this force but if we want a security and foreign policy worthy of the name, then we need to avoid situations where each request for troops in Lebanon or in Africa, leads to a bidding war. It would be preferable to have a military and a police force – in accordance with what is requested of us in Afghanistan or in Lebanon - capable of being deployed rapidly. The United States will once more ask for Europe’s help and Europe should reply in order to fulfill its role as a partner. We need a foreign policy and a security policy which fit with our priority objectives and in particular in the fields of energy and immigration.

During the French presidency an unforeseen crisis broke out: the Russo-Georgian conflict. I do not support the Georgian initiative nor the excessive Russian reply nor even the antimissile shield which is supposed to protect us from Iran. The Russians know fine well that they are its target. We should also ask ourselves how we can integrate Russia into the concept of European security. Russia is no longer the great traditional enemy, even if it is not easy to negotiate with this country. The security of Europe cannot be built without Russia and the message concerning the antimissile shield is not believable.

In such conditions how can one be surprised that European citizens are eurosceptical? How can you imagine that they believe us?
In the preparatory documents for the G20, the Union proposes, along with the United States and Latin America to regulate tax havens. It does so in language typical of our waffle. Everyone knows what it is about but no one understands why we use such language.

How can we improve communication with our citizens? By speaking more clearly! And I will continue to express myself in this way, even if melancholy is the price to pay. (Applause.)

(Mr. Gérard Larcher succeeds Mr. Bernard Accoyer in the chair.)

M. Přemysl Sobokta, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic. There are several ways to debate the future of Europe for the year 2030 but the worst one would be to fall into the trap of optimistic slogans which claim that everything is rosy in the garden and to set down five-year plans. We, the former communist countries, have known economic centralization, state interventionism and bureaucratic paralysis: in the very interests of Europe, we refuse such temptations which seem to attract certain of our western European colleagues, for reasons which escape us.

The experts must provide us with serious forecasts as regards demography and the economy and in energy and security matters. However, as we are gathered here today as European parliamentarians, let us discuss the future of our institutional practices.

Let us not be afraid to listen to the smaller or newer members of the European Union.

Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic proposed the setting-up of a European Senate. I share this idea which would enable us to avoid certain of the mistakes made by the European Parliament. My long parliamentary experience has taught me that a Senate can take a certain distance on matters and knows how to deal with fundamental issues; it does not seek to decide on the size of bananas and cucumbers.

The proposal was met with a wall of silence. However, this was not the case for the critical message of Mr. Václav Klaus on the risks of integration, which caused quite a stir.

If I mention these two examples, it was so that no one here might think that Czech politicians are indifferent to European policies!

Let us open up then a serious debate on a second European chamber, its make-up and its powers. Let us not be afraid of a robust debate on the risks which threaten European democracy and let us replace media flashes with real reflection. Thus I believe that equal representation in a European Senate will be a guarantee of equality and will strengthen democracy without discrimination.

Let us not forget the national Parliaments which are close to the citizens and protect us from bureaucracy. I am convinced that in 2030, they will play this role more than ever. Otherwise a grey Europe, a sad Europe, an economically weak Europe will not be able to face up to the challenges of the future.

The ideas of subsidiarity and proportionality are essential signposts on the European road. We must not give them up!

The debate on Europe is precious, not only for the experts but also for the national Parliaments. I wish that we all may live long enough to see the year 2030 and I hope above all, that our efforts will enable our children to live happily in 2030 in each of our countries. (Applause.)
President Gérard Larcher. May I just remind you all that the idea for a European Senate was first of all put forward by one of my predecessors at the presidency of the French Senate, Mr. Alain Poher, who was, incidentally, a companion of Jean Monnet.

Mr. Javier Rojo, President of the Senate of Spain. Good management of public policies is necessary for our democracies to progress. However, so that our citizens feel associated with the European idea, we need to have a shared future and offer real hope. Today there are many uncertainties especially in the field of security.

Strong leadership will be needed to reply to the great challenges of tomorrow: social cohesion, climate change, migratory flows. As Felipe González said, in a democracy, it is not the bureaucracy which is in charge of these problems: the European model depends on this.

There is a European institutional problem: the constitutional treaty failed and we must wait to judge the fate of the Lisbon treaty. But we no longer have much time to set up a Europe which operates. We must however be able to define what Europe’s role is. We must do this with confidence since hesitation has dangerous consequences and can lead to the birth of scepticism and xenophobia.

We must both reflect and act but without abandoning the legitimate interests of each nation. As Felipe González said, each of us must reflect upon a common project in order to strengthen the European Union which must play a leading role as a major political and economic player. I am not only speaking here of political players but also of economic players and of the citizens who, in their daily lives, sometimes have the impression that they are the forgotten players in a bureaucratic project.

I am a convinced European and I believe that we must make all possible efforts for Europe to be strong. The contribution of people like Felipe González will help us to build the strong Europe which we desire, to bring us closer to the aspirations of our citizens and to bring the institutions closer to the citizens.

Mr. Pavel Gantar, President of the National Assembly of Slovenia. I believe that none of those who set up our meeting could have imagined the effects of the economic crisis on Europe today. However if we do not wish to relive the scenarios of the past, then we must react.

Today’s Europe is not that of fifteen years ago; we have been able to reply to the problems of economic integration and to successfully follow the transition in the countries of Central Europe. We have built the Euro and the new countries have settled down in the European house. The European Union has come through this period stronger.

Today we are facing new challenges: globalization, demographic flows, climate change and security problems. Our economic conceptions and even our institutions are being put to the test. Are they reacting quickly enough? Is their democratic legitimacy sufficient? Answers have already been given at an international level and I hope that we will go even further along this road.

We must be quick and fair – as the crisis is serious – and we must avoid the every-man-for-himself attitude and remain optimistic.

We do not know what the Europe of 2030 will be like. It would perhaps be easier to imagine it if we could know what it will be like in a few years.
M. Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. The task of the reflection group led by Felipe González, is a difficult one, if ever there was one: it is indeed difficult to imagine what the world will look like in 2030 when we do not even know what it will look like in 2010. Few were those who forecast in 2008 the situation we would be living through in 2009: the crisis happened too quickly for even the most brilliant minds to predict.

Europe must show its solidarity and look ahead. However it must not wallow in insularity: the world is changing around us. A new world order is emerging and the balance is shifting – think about the new role of the countries of the east. Will Africa be an important actor on the world stage in 2030? Will the clashes in the Near East be solved or will they lead to a nuclear war? What about the Middle East, on which we depend for our energy supplies? What about climate change and demographic developments? How will we feed our planet – I am thinking of genetically modified organisms? What will be the future of the energy question – I am thinking of nuclear energy? What about the medicines of tomorrow and their trafficking? Will the single currency help us to overcome the crisis? Will we manage to resist protectionism? What will life expectancy be?

We must, above all, be involved in gaining the best means to use our knowledge: if we want to stay in the race, we must use our continent’s talents and go well beyond what we are doing today in the education field. Then and only then will we manage to give birth to hope.

Mr. Arunas Valinskas, President of the Diet of Lithuania. The Europe of today is entirely different from the Europe of yesterday. Then the idea of a united Europe was born thanks to our powers of imagination. The European Union has been able to create a European Institute of Technology: innovation and research must be the engines for solutions which we will find to the problems that we will meet. Thanks to reflection and imagination, these solutions will come from original sources.

I agree with certain speakers and in particular Mr. Haselhurst, in remembering that the founding fathers conceived of Europe to ensure security through solidarity and economic growth and that protectionism and the protection of national interests are hurdles to solidarity. Thus, courageous decisions must be taken on a common market for energy supply, on the introduction of the Euro, on the future development of transatlantic links and on immigration questions.

I am optimistic: the current period seems much better than the Brezhnev one. Between now and 2030, our economic model will have to take sustainable development into account whilst, at the same time, respecting the principle of free competition. It will be then, we hope, that unemployment and social exclusion will belong firmly to the past.

Europe depends on our decisions. But will we have the will to act or will we content ourselves with listening to those who speak loudest? (Applause.)

M. Vannino Chiti, Vice President of the Senate of Italy. I much appreciated the speech made by Mr. Felipe González: he set down long-term perspectives, whilst underlining the importance of concrete action. It is not so easy to deal with both at the same time.

The President of the French Republic, Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, told us yesterday: the European Union must, in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century, have a strong identity, but it must also know how to protect its own interests. This European identity, that of a supranational homeland, does not abolish national identities: these remain but cannot solve
the current problems. M. Pöttering, the President of the European Parliament, spoke to us yesterday of the dignity of the human being, of freedom and democracy, of the promotion – not aggressive but uncompromising – of human rights and of social justice founded on solidarity.

After this crisis nothing will ever be as before. The European Union is essential for us to come through it. As Mr. Bruno Le Maire said, the Treaty of Lisbon along with other courageous decisions, will help us to do this: we need a new social pact for the 21st century. The Lisbon Agenda must be reviewed and we must promote social cohesion, thanks to regulation, as well as helping innovation. It is also important to gather together the means which today are dispersed.

I express my agreement with what has been said on energy independence and immigration.

International relations are essential. The European Union must know how to play its role, more often than not, hand in hand with the United States but also in assuming its own responsibilities in crucial areas such as the Mediterranean and Eastern Europe. We must find a way to integrate Russia into the security policies.

I would like to conclude with a topic which, although it is not at the heart of the work carried out by the group led by Mr. Felipe González, is nonetheless at the heart of the political debate: Turkey and its relations with the European Union. The countries which wish to join the European Union must, of course, respect its principles and must satisfy certain criteria. But I believe that the majority of Italian political groups consider that Turkey should be part of the European Union, so that Europe may be a common house for peoples who defend the same values and the same aims, who respect the same democratic rules and who share the conception of a Europe which takes action in the security and energy supply fields.

We must avoid the clash of civilizations! This is one of the main objectives of the European project. (Applause.)

**Mrs. Barbara Prammer, President of the National Council of Austria.** I feel that it is very important for national Parliaments and for the European Parliament to discuss the conclusions of the reflection group led by Mr. Felipe González and to add their own contributions.

We must successfully implement our formal tasks, in particular the Treaty of Lisbon, but the national Parliaments, which are closer to the citizens, must also help in defining a perspective for Europe.

The era of unilateralism, as Mr. Felipe González underlined, finished a long time ago. We must redefine Europe without knowing what 2030 will look like; but one thing is certain – Europe will only be strong if its citizens are with us, if we can make the Austrians, the French, the Spanish and all the others, understand that they are, above all else, Europeans. This will only be possible if we give a meaning to the European idea.

The European social model is at the centre of our concerns. In these times of crisis, we must avoid social tensions. We must therefore meet the economic challenge as quickly as possible.

The European model is that of a community where democracy lives and where the dignity of man is at the centre of our concerns. In the case of the Romani people, I want to underline that what happened in Hungary in recent days, occurred in Austria twelve years ago. The way we treat our minorities is a good indicator of the state of health of our democratic values.
I agree with what my British colleague said concerning education: education alone can guarantee that the democratic development of Europe will continue.

In the security field, I agree with Mr. De Decker’s speech. We must continue to debate the organizational strategy for the parliamentary monitoring of our common foreign and security policies.

As for nuclear energy, Austria remains firmly opposed to it and I am convinced that all those who have nuclear power plants on their territory would, most of all, wish to avoid any kind of attack. Our hope is to persuade others that there are indeed alternatives to nuclear energy.

**M. Louis Galea, President of the Chamber of representatives of Malta.** The long speech by Mr. Felipe González asked a question concerning European communication towards its citizens. Unfortunately he did not reply to that question.

Mr. Felipe González referred to several issues. I would like to concentrate on information and communication technologies – a question which is closely linked to that of social cohesion.

The digital divide is a new phenomenon and it must be reduced if we are to avoid new social fractures. There must therefore be specific reflection on how to gain the most from such technologies and the changes in the media and how they will totally transform the way authorities communicate with the citizens. Think about the electoral campaign and now the presidency of Barak Obama: this direct communication with the citizens of the United States is a true revolution!

As speakers of the national Parliaments of our respective countries, we must solve this problem urgently: the general public is setting up its own internet sites and is exchanging experiences and information. Within the framework of our reflection on the future, it is crucial to understand how our populations may obtain the abilities necessary to use such information and communication technologies wisely, for they will be at the very heart of our societies in the future. *(Applause.)*

**M. Georgi Pirinski, President of the National Assembly of Bulgaria.** If I am not mistaken, it was in 2007, at the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, that President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed the setting-up of this reflection group: the idea was to set down the perspectives for several decades to come. The crisis makes such work even more necessary as we must find solutions and construct a common political project.

Almost twenty years have passed since the changes of 1989: at that time none of us could have imagined the world as it is at present. In hindsight, we understand that the market economy does not provide the answers to everything. We therefore need a strategy, rather like the Monnet Plan.

I propose that Mr. Felipe González be invited to all the European Councils in order to debate with all the participants. The members of the European Parliament Committee on Constitutional Matters advised him to talk to the citizens: I believe that they were right. *(Applause.)*

**Mrs. Katalin Szili, President of the National Assembly of Hungary.** This debate, along with the fascinating speech made by Mr. Felipe González, proves that the future is being built. As national representatives, we have a great responsibility in this construction: we do not have the right to use uncertainties as a pretext to not set out a vision for Europe in 2030. We must respond to this crisis.
As Mr. Felipe González underlined, social problems cannot be solved independently of each other: we must do all we can to come up with overall solutions. We must contribute to this reflection on a European level but it is also important to react at a “local” level by taking into account what the citizens think. I feel that all of this should be discussed by national Parliaments.

To conclude, I would like to quote a proverb: if the Captain does not know where to sail his ship, then it is the wind which is at the helm. *(Applause.)*

**M. Luka Bebić, President of the Parliament of Croatia.** I would like to thank you for having invited me to share with you, once again, my thoughts as a representative of a candidate country.

Mr. Felipe González brought up a number of essential questions for the future of Europe and the world. We may, it seems to me, summarize his speech in one principle: we must meet our responsibilities and build solid foundations for the future.

The modern world is in permanent flux. But it does have its problems, like those raised by the financial crisis or by climate change. The whole world faces these problems but the same solutions are not necessarily applicable at a national level as at an international level.

Today, the European Union is the most successful model for multilateral integration. Its origin lies in a vision for regional cooperation and Europe has changed, thanks to the perspectives which were laid out by its founders. In the future, Europe must be a protagonist on the international stage. It possesses economic, political and even military instruments and its institutions are the best way to overcome the crises we are currently facing and which will continue to get worse.

In 2030, Europe’s ranks will have swelled to include all of the countries of the south-west of the continent: it will stretch as far perhaps as Ukraine and Turkey. It is therefore quite difficult to see how it must proceed in order to ensure a prosperous future.

Europeans must speak with a single voice and reply together to the common challenges. The importance of energy is growing and growing and Europe must continue to invest more to ensure its supply. Such efforts are closely linked to immigration policy and to the problems it poses, in particular illegal immigration which can be a threat to internal security.

Mr. José Manuel Barroso told us that Europe must be open to change, to dialogue and to an exchange of ideas. This opening-up would ensure the promotion of the vision of Europe which I mentioned: this powerful Europe which will speak with a single voice, will know how to play its role for the benefit of all on the international stage. *(Applause.)*

**President Gérard Larcher.** Thank you to everyone.

What seems important then is that today’s challenges can very usefully light up the future and allow us to meet the economic, social and ecological challenges of tomorrow. Let us not forget to think “locally” and to define European values well: nothing can be constructed without the understanding of European citizens.

*(The sitting which was adjourned at eleven-fifteen is reconvened at eleven-thirty.)*

**M. Miloslav Vlček, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic.** Ladies and gentlemen I will allow everyone to draw his/her own conclusions from this debate. I just wish to inform you that Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and I would like a European delegation to go to Gaza
and to Israel during the Czech presidency. This delegation which I will lead, will be made up of representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly.

I would request all the delegations of national Parliaments who are interested, to contact me. The dates of the mission and the composition of the delegation will be decided upon later.

I am convinced that, together, we can bring progress to the peace process in the region.
DEBATE ON THE DRAFT CONCLUSIONS OF THE PRESIDENCY

President Gérard Larcher. Certain of you have made it known that you request modifications to the draft conclusions of the presidency.

We have had a modified version of these conclusions distributed which takes into account your requests and has a summary of the different desires expressed. A new version which includes the proposals which have just been made, is available in French and will be available in English in a few moments.

I remind you that our aim is to adopt by consensus what we agree to call the “conclusions of the presidency”. Consequently, we must now reach a general agreement on the conclusions which reflects as faithfully as possible, the very rich debates which we have had, even if each of us would, no doubt, have preferred a slightly different wording. However, we must take into account all the different tendencies and make sure that the conclusions create no fundamental problems for any of us.

This is what we have attempted to do in trying to gain a balance between the amendments suggested by the various delegations on the basis of the text which was presented to you yesterday evening.

I suggest that we go through the paragraphs of the draft conclusions.

Preliminary Remarks

President Gérard Larcher. I call on you to express an opinion on the six paragraphs of “preliminary remarks”.

(Paragraphs 1 to 6 of the “Preliminary remarks” are adopted.)

Conclusions of the Presidency

President Gérard Larcher. Let us now move on to the “Conclusions of the Presidency” per se.

Provisions “Concerning the institutional future of the Union and the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon by national Parliaments”

Mrs. Barbara Prammer, President of the National Council of Austria. If we all agree with the fact that the European Council of December 11-12, 2008 laid down the way, then why don’t we “welcome” in paragraph 1, rather than simply “observe”. I feel that we would thus send out a more positive signal.

Mr. Georgi Pirinski, President of the National Assembly of Bulgaria. The formula “a renewed institutional framework liable to bring Europe closer to its citizens” could perhaps be reformulated.
Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. I would come under enormous pressure in the House of Commons if I were to support our Austrian colleague’s proposal, as not all my British colleagues “welcome” the fact that the European Council has laid down that particular path.

In addition, it seems to me, that keeping the word “observe” would be more respectful to the countries where the process of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon is ongoing.

President Gérard Larcher. We are very careful about this process and we wish that the Irish people, in particular, can go along with the Treaty of Lisbon.

M. John O’Donoghue, Speaker of the National Assembly of Ireland. The last phrase in the paragraph underlines that the European Council has provided a reply to Irish concerns. However we must not anticipate the result of the referendum even if I hope that it will bring good news for Europe – a recent opinion poll shows that public opinion supports ratification more and more.

President Gérard Larcher. I propose the adoption of paragraph 1 with the following wording:

“The Speakers observe the continuation of the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon which provides the Union with a renewed institutional framework liable to bring Europe closer to its citizens, in particular thanks to the strengthening of the prerogatives of Parliament whether it be those of the national Parliaments or those of the European Parliament. They observe that the European Council of December 11-12, 2008 laid down the path to make it possible for the treaty to come into force before the end of 2009 by committing itself to supplying the necessary legal guarantees which answer the concerns expressed by the Irish people.”

(Paragraph 1, thus modified is adopted.)

(Paragraph 3 is adopted as also are paragraphs 3 to 8.)

Provisions “Concerning the Involvement of Parliament in Crisis Management”

(Paragraph 9 is adopted as is paragraph 10.)

M. Arunas Valinskas, President of the Diet of Lithuania. Solidarity is a constant value in the Union. Emphazing the fact that it is necessary “in times of crisis” seems quite reductive and I therefore propose to remove these words at the end of paragraph 11.

President Gérard Larcher. What do the Polish and Danish representatives, who are the authors of this wording of the paragraph, think?

(Agreement.)

(Paragraph 11, thus modified is adopted.)
Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. Even if it is necessary that Europe speaks with a single voice in dealing with the crisis, it seems rather excessive to use the verb “welcome”, three times in paragraph 12.

Mr. Gianfranco Fini, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy. I understand the reticence of our colleague, even if the idea of a common vision is precisely at the basis of the European Union.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. We could propose a wording which should satisfy everyone before the end of the sitting.

President Gérard Larcher. Paragraph 12 is held over until just after the end of the examination of the other paragraphs.

(Mr. Bernard Accoyer takes over the chair again.)

President Bernard Accoyer. We shall continue with the examination of the paragraphs of the draft conclusions.

We are now at paragraph 13.

Lord John Roper, Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords of the United Kindom. Paragraph 13 does not deal only with crisis management but also with inter-parliamentary exchanges in the broadest sense. I therefore suggest that we place before this paragraph the sub-title “Concerning the Practices of Parliaments during European Presidencies” which is currently placed before paragraph 14.

(This is agreed upon.)

Provisions “Concerning the Practices of Parliaments during European Presidencies”

(Paragraph 13 is adopted, as is paragraph 14.)

Provisions “Concerning the Future of Europe for the Year 2030”

(Paragraph 15 is adopted as also are paragraphs 16 and 17.)

Mrs. Barbara Prammer, President of the National Council of Austria. It seems to me to be rather unwise to write in paragraph 18 that the institutional framework will be a decisive element for the future of the Union whilst decisions in this matter have not yet begun to be applied. This could create difficulties in several national Parliaments, in particular in Austria. It has already been sufficiently difficult to become involved in the way of the Treaty of Lisbon for us to avoid anticipating the conclusions of the working group on inter-institutional cooperation.
I therefore propose the removal of this paragraph.

(Paragraph 18 is removed.)

**President Bernard Accoyer.** We now come to paragraph 12, which was previously held over.

I shall read you the wording proposed by our British colleagues.

“The Speakers envisage that the European Union will speak with a single voice in order to play its full role in the reform of the international finance system, to strengthen the coordination of the national recovery plans and to launch a cooperative dynamic in the common interest.” The rests remains as is.

(Paragraph 12, thus modified, is adopted.)

**Mr. Alan Haselhurst, Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom.** We are delighted that our colleagues have accepted the amendments which we proposed.

**Mr. Gianfranco Fini, President of the Chamber of Deputies of Italy.** I am sorry but I would like to come back to paragraph 4: why refer in it to other languages than French and English? The publication in the language of each state is up to each national Parliament.

**President Bernard Accoyer.** I propose that we keep to the wording adopted, upon the request of several colleagues, at our last conference.

Thank you all for having participated in this debate on the conclusions of the presidency. Each of us has shown good will and so we have reached agreement. The definitive version of these conclusions, which will include your last propositions, will be sent to you as of Monday.
Closing of the Conference

President Bernard Accoyer. So we arrive at the end of our proceedings. I would like to thank all the speakers, deputy speakers, Presidents and vice presidents for having come to Paris for our annual conference. I want to say that, as far as I am concerned, and I think I also speak in the name of Gérard Larcher, our meeting will be an excellent memory.

On each of the topics we dealt with, the exchanges were particularly rich and have enabled us to put forward promising ideas for the future.

Thus we have come to a broad agreement to strengthen inter-parliamentary cooperation and to each a new stage in the implementation of our enlarged powers. The presidents of assemblies clearly have an important role to play in this area.

Similarly, the debates on Europe and crisis management proved that Parliaments can become more involved and contribute to the search for joint solutions which would clearly avoid the dangerous path of protectionism.

And finally, the exchanges we had this morning on the future of Europe have underlined that, beyond the understandable differences between national positions, our common desire is to provide Europe with a project which can find broad acceptance amongst our citizens.

Mr. Per Westerberg, President of the Swedish Parliament, now wishes to say a few words to us.

Mr. Per Westerberg, President of the Parliament of Sweden. Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on the excellent organization of this conference and thank you for your hospitality.

I would be very pleased, on behalf of the Swedish Parliament, to welcome you to Stockholm, on May 14-15, 2010, for our next conference. (loud applause.)

President Bernard Accoyer. Thank you very much for this invitation. We have no doubt concerning the quality of the welcome which we shall receive in Sweden.

We shall now conclude the meeting with a lunch-cruise on the River Seine.

I would like to thank the interpreters in the name of us all for the quality of their work and for their dedication.

My dear colleagues, I thank you very warmly for your presence, for your active participation and for your unstoppable desire to make progress together in the great causes of Europe: peace, democracy and justice. (loud applause.)

The sitting was closed at five minutes past twelve