

#### **4. Address by the Rt Hon. David Cameron MP, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom**

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Many colleagues want to ask questions, so I appeal to you all to respect the 30-second time limit for questions.

We now have the honour of hearing an address by Mr David Cameron, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. After his address, the Prime Minister has kindly agreed to take questions from the floor.

*(The speaker continued in summary)*

He welcomed Mr Cameron on behalf of all members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and said that he was addressing the Assembly at a symbolic moment because the United Kingdom was the current Chair of the Committee of Ministers. It was an historic time in Europe and a period of great change. For example, there was the on-going economic crisis in the Eurozone; the expansion of the internet and digital media; and the rise of extremist groups and parties. In the face of such issues, it was vital to remain united and committed to the European cause.

Challenging times brought to mind the words of one of Mr Cameron's predecessors, Sir Winston Churchill, when he addressed the inaugural session of the Assembly on 10 August 1949. Mr Churchill had said that the delegates were meeting not as representatives of their different countries or different political parties but as Europeans marching together hand in hand and, if necessary, shoulder to shoulder in order to revive the past glories of Europe and in order to establish Europe as an independent power in the new world. It was obvious that Mr Cameron was also committed to this project. He clearly shared the vision that had enabled the Council of Europe to be a driving force in the process of European reconstruction following the fall of the Berlin Wall and that enabled its current work protecting human rights both within and beyond Europe's borders.

The United Kingdom's commitment to this project had been further reaffirmed by David Lidington, the United Kingdom's Minister for Europe, when he had addressed the Assembly on 24 January.

Mr Cameron had a clear set of priorities for the United Kingdom's chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The Assembly was looking forward to hearing his views: he was invited to take the floor.

Mr CAMERON (*Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*) – Thank you for that kind and generous introduction.

Once in a generation, each member state has the honour of leading the Council of Europe and today I want to speak about the once-in-a-generation chance that we have, together, to improve the way we enhance the causes of human rights, of freedom and of dignity. We have an ambitious agenda for the coming months – to reinforce local democracy, to combat discrimination, and to strengthen the rule of law across Europe – but, as you know, the focus of our chairmanship is our joint effort to reform the European Court of Human Rights.

The role of the Court has never been more challenging. As the Council has

expanded, more and more people have applied to seek justice. We need to work together to ensure that, throughout these changes, the Court remains true to its original intention: to uphold the Convention and to prevent the abuse of human rights. So today I want to explain why I believe the Court needs reform and set out some of the proposals that are on the table.

First, I want to make something clear: human rights is a cause that runs deep in the British heart and long in British history. In the 13th century, Magna Carta set down specific rights for citizens, including the right to freedom from unlawful detention. In the 17th century in Britain, the Petition of Right gave new authority to Parliament and the Bill of Rights set limits on the power of the monarchy. By the 18th century, it was said that this spirit of liberty was so deeply implanted in our constitution and rooted in our very soil that a slave, the moment he lands in England, falls under the protection of the laws and, with regard to all natural rights, instantly becomes a free man. It was that spirit that led to the abolition of slavery, that drove the battle against tyranny in two world wars, and that inspired Winston Churchill to promise that the end of the world struggle would see the enthronement of human rights. As he put it, victory in that war was the victory of an ideal founded on the right of the common man, on the dignity of the human being and on the conception of the state as servant, not master, of its people.

These beliefs have animated the British people for centuries, and they still animate us today. When the Arab Spring erupted, the UK was a principal supporter of resolutions at the United Nations Human Rights Council. We are leading, with EU partners, efforts to maintain the pressure on Syria. We played a key role in securing EU sanctions against Iran. Through the United Nations, we are working to empower women in Afghanistan, Iraq and throughout the Middle East. We have pledged additional money to the Special Fund of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture, and we are contributing to the Council of Europe's own Human Rights Trust Fund. All these are clear signals of our belief in fundamental human rights, and if called to defend that belief, not just with words, but with action, we act. When the people of Libya were reaching for the chance to shape their own destiny, Britain stepped forward, with our allies, to help. Visiting Tripoli a few months ago and seeing the crowds of people jubilant and free, I was reminded of something that Margaret Thatcher once said: "The spirit of freedom is too strong to be crushed by the tanks of tyrants." It is our hope that this spirit of freedom spreads further, and we will continue to support those reaching for it across the Arab world.

We are not, and never will be, a country that walks on by while human rights are trampled into the dust. This has a lot to do with Britain's national character – a love of freedom, an instinctive loathing of over-mighty authority – but it is also about our national interest: to live, to travel, to trade in a more open and secure world. When a government respects its citizens' human rights, it makes for a more stable country, and that is good for all of us. It was that great champion of freedom, Václav Havel, who put it best: "Without free, self-respecting and autonomous citizens there can be no free and independent nations. Without internal peace, that is, peace among citizens and between the citizens and the state, there can be no guarantee of external peace." In other words, a commitment to human rights is both morally right and strategically right.

I want no one here to doubt, therefore, the British commitment to defending

human rights. Nor do I want anyone to doubt the British understanding that the Council of Europe, the Convention and the Court have played a vital role in upholding those rights. But believing those things does not mean sticking to the status quo. As we are agreed, the time is right to ask some serious questions about how the Court is working.

More than 60 years ago, the Convention was drafted with some very clear intentions. It was born on a continent reeling from totalitarian rule. It was shocked by the brutality of the Holocaust and sickened by man's inhumanity to man. Its purpose was clear: to spread across our continent respect for fundamental human rights, including the right to life, liberty and the integrity of the person. And it has achieved some vital things over the decades: from exposing torture to winning victories against degrading treatment in police custody and holding heavy-handed states to account. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, it has played a major role in strengthening democracy across central and eastern Europe.

Furthermore, we should remember that oppression and brutality are not just facts about Europe's past; as we sit here today, people in Belarus are being thrown into prison for their political beliefs and dissidents' voices are being silenced and their rights crushed. What is happening less than 1 000 miles from here underlines the continuing importance and relevance of the Council of Europe, the Convention and the Court. It reminds us that now, more than ever, we need a Court that is a beacon for the cause of human rights, ruthlessly focused on defending human freedom and dignity, and respected across the continent and the world.

In that spirit, I have come to speak to you today. Today, the ability of the Court to play that vital role is under threat. As I see it, there are three interlinking issues that should cause us concern. First, the Court is being compelled to do too much, and that threatens its ability to do that which is most important. We have seen a massive increase in the number of cases. In the first 40 years of its existence, 45 000 cases were presented to the Court. In 2010 alone, 61 300 applications were presented. That has created, and goes on creating, a huge backlog – it was more than 160 000 at its peak. There can still be a delay of years before cases are heard, which means that tens of thousands of people have their lives put on hold. Those cases will inevitably include some of the most serious cases – cases of detention, torture and people who have had their fundamental rights denied.

Let me be clear: impressive steps are already being taken to filter out inadmissible cases more quickly. The Court should be congratulated on that. But a new problem is emerging. More and more of the backlog now comprises admissible cases that, according to current criteria, should be heard in full. Again, the Court is doing good work to deal with that. A system to prioritise the most important cases is in place, but the sheer volume risks urgent cases getting stuck in the queue. That means that the very purpose of the Court – to prevent the most serious violations of human rights – is under threat.

The flood of cases is linked to the second issue. The Court is properly safeguarding the right of individual petition, and that is a principle to which the UK is committed, but with that comes the risk of turning the Court into a court of the fourth instance, because there will already have been a first

hearing in a court, a second hearing in an appeal court, and a third in a supreme or constitutional court. In effect, that gives an extra bite at the cherry to anyone who is dissatisfied with a domestic ruling, even when that judgment is reasonable, well founded and in line with the Convention.

Quite simply, the Court must be able to protect itself against spurious cases that have been dealt with at the national level. A good start has been made with Protocol No. 14, which makes it clear that cases are not admissible where there is no significant disadvantage to the applicant. The initial case in which that protocol has been used shows exactly what I mean. The applicant, in this case, took a bus company to court for €90 compensation because they felt that their journey from Bucharest to Madrid had not been as comfortable as advertised. One of the matters at issue was that the bus company did not provide fully reclining seats. Now, the domestic courts had turned him down, and he was taking the case to the Court. I think we can all agree that fully reclining seats would be most desirable on a trip from Bucharest to Madrid, but I think that we can also agree that it was a completely trivial case, and not the kind of case that should be heard here. The Court agreed with that, and rightly rejected the claim. That case underlines how important it is for the Court to have consistent power to control the cases that it admits.

I come to the third issue. The Court is, quite rightly, determined to ensure that consistent standards of rights are upheld across the 47 member states, but at times it has felt to us in national governments that what is called the margin of appreciation, which allows different interpretations of the Convention, has shrunk, and that not enough account is being taken of democratic decisions of national parliaments. I think that we should be frank about the fallout from this issue. As the margin of appreciation has shrunk, so the controversy has grown.

You will know that in the United Kingdom there is a lively debate about how human rights law works and how our national courts interact with Europe. Yes, some of this is misinterpretation, but some of this is credible democratic anxiety, as with the prisoner voting issue. I completely understand the Court's belief that a national decision must be properly made, but in the end I believe that when such an issue has been subjected to proper, reasoned, democratic debate and has met with detailed scrutiny by national courts in line with the Convention, the decision should be treated with respect.

Another example of this issue – and one, I suspect, on which we can all agree – is the area of immigration. At Izmir, we collectively invited the Court to avoid intervening except in the most exceptional cases. All states agreed that the Court was, in some cases, too ready to substitute its judgments for those of reasonable national processes, and all agreed at Izmir that that was not the role of the Court. In other words, the Court should not see itself as an immigration tribunal.

Linked to that is the issue of terrorism. Protecting a country from terrorism is one of the most important tasks of any government. Again, no one should argue – I would never argue – that we defend our system of rights and freedoms by suspending those rights and freedoms, but we have a real problem when it comes to foreign nationals who threaten our security. In Britain, we have gone through all reasonable national processes, including

painstaking international agreements on how they should be treated and scrutiny by our own courts, yet we are still unable to deport them.

It is not, therefore, that some people start asking questions about whether the current arrangements are sensible – of course, no decent country should deport people if they were to be tortured – but the problem today is that we can end up with someone who has no right to live in your country, whom you are convinced, and have good reason to be convinced, means to do your country harm, yet there are circumstances in which you cannot try them, detain them or deport them.

So having put in place every possible safeguard to ensure that ECHR rights are not violated, we still cannot fulfil our duty to law-abiding citizens to protect them. Together, we have to find a solution to that. These concerns are shared by many member states, and at their heart is not antipathy to human rights, but anxiety that the concept of human rights is in danger of being distorted. As a result, for too many people the very concept of rights is in danger of slipping from something noble to something that can become discredited, and that should be of great concern to us all.

Upholding and promoting human rights is not something that governments and the Court can do alone – it is something that we need all our societies to be engaged with. When controversial rulings overshadow the good and patient long-term work that has been done, that not only fails to do justice to the work of the Court, but it has a corrosive effect on people's support for human rights. The Court cannot afford to lose the confidence of the people of Europe.

Taken together, these issues threaten to shift the role of the Court away from its key objectives. The Court should be free to deal with the most serious violations of human rights. It should not be swamped with an endless backlog of cases. The Court should ensure that the right to individual petition counts, but it should not act as a small claims court.

The Court should hold us all to account; it should not undermine its own reputation by going over national decisions where it does not need to. For the sake of the 800 million people the Court serves, we need to reform it so that it is true to its original purpose. Already, 47 members are agreed on this, and great work has been done. We would like to use the chairmanship to progress that work. This is the right moment for reforms – reforms that are practical, sensible and that will, we believe, enhance the reputation of the Court.

We are looking to improve the efficiency of the Court; new rules could enable it to focus more efficiently and transparently on the most important cases. We ought to improve the procedures for nominating judges. The Assembly needs consistently strong shortlists from which to elect judges, and clear guidelines on national selection procedures could help with that. We are hoping to get consensus on strengthening subsidiarity, the principle that, where possible, final decisions should be made nationally.

It is, of course, correct that the Court should hold governments to account where they fail to protect human rights. In these instances, of course it is right for the Court to intervene, but what we are all striving for is that national governments should take primary responsibility for safeguarding

their citizens' rights, and that they should do that well. Subsidiarity is a fundamental principle of the convention, and at Izmir we were all clear that more needed to be done to give it practical effect. For that reason, we will shortly set out our proposals for pushing responsibility to the national system. In that way, we can free up the Court to concentrate on the worst, the most flagrant, human rights violations, and to challenge national courts when they clearly have not followed the Convention.

Of course, rebalancing this relationship is a two-way street. The other side of the deal is that members must get better at implementing the Convention at national level. That is why in the United Kingdom we are investigating the case for a Bill of Rights, and thoroughly examining the way in which our liberties are protected. Parliaments also have a key role and we are proud of the role that our Joint Committee on Human Rights plays. Of course, this Assembly makes a vital contribution, helping states to honour their obligations. Together, through these institutions, we can reduce the number of violations and ultimately ease the burden on the Court.

Let me finish by saying this: with this chairmanship we have a clear opportunity to agree a practical programme of reform. It should be built on the noble intentions of the Convention and it should be forged through consensus. It should be driven by a belief in fundamental human rights and a passion to advance them. This is undoubtedly a challenge, but I believe that it is a challenge we can meet together. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you for your riveting statement. Now we have question time; you are well accustomed to this.

The first question is from Mr Volontè on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party.

Mr VOLONTÈ (*Italy*) – One of the most important political actions of your government is the promotion of subsidiarity, which you call the big society – the responsibility of each person, each family and each local community, the three fundamental values of every Council of Europe member state. How is work going, particularly concerning a new family policy to define your government's priorities after the acts of vandalism in August?

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – I strongly believe that if you want to achieve social change, improve the state of your society and build a stronger country, you cannot rely on government alone. The concept of the big society is simply asking what we, as individuals, parents, businesses and local organisations, can do to solve complex social problems and make the country a stronger place. It consists of encouraging philanthropy, obviously, but it is also about devolving power to the lowest level so that community organisations, community groups, local government – what I would call the little platoons that make up society – are capable of delivering that change. We are passing legislation in our parliament to empower small local organisations and give them greater control in our country.

Part of it is also about trying to strengthen families – the building block of a strong and good society. We should be looking at all the ways in which we

can bolster and build up families. When we think, as you put in your question, about what happened on the streets of the United Kingdom last August, we know that there is a response involving crime, policing, punishment and court cases, but we also know that there is a role for accepting that in the end it is families, not the state, who bring up children and we need to help them with the vital work that they do.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. The next question is from Mr Michel on behalf of the Socialist Party.

Mr MICHEL (*France*) asked whether the United Kingdom Government would implement the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights immediately and completely. Problems with the administration of the Court should not be used as an excuse to question its jurisdiction.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – Whether in the context of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the ECHR, Britain has always been pretty prompt at putting into place the judgments and laws that we are required to implement. We may have a reputation for complaining about these things, and for questioning whether this European law is really necessary and this regulation is something that we want to do in the context of the European Union, but when it comes to which countries put those laws in place, or indeed the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, I would argue that we are pretty fast in doing so. We have a pretty fundamental approach towards the rule of law, which is that you should not sign up to things that you are not subsequently prepared to put into your own legal system. So I think that we have a fairly good record on that and I would challenge the point that you put.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – The next question is from Mr Seyidov on behalf of the European Democrat Group.

Mr SEYIDOV (*Azerbaijan*) – I welcome you to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In our group, there is a large number of representatives from different European countries including the United Kingdom, Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. I am from Azerbaijan, and despite the fact that we are representatives of different cultures, we are fighting for common European values. In your previous speeches you have expressed your opinion concerning multiculturalism. Could you clarify your understanding of this phenomenon?

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – Thank you for that welcome. I made a speech in Germany last year trying to explain what I felt about this. Britain is a very good example of a country that is a successful multiracial democracy. People from all over the world and communities from all parts of the world live in Britain with full rights and full participation. I think we have demonstrated how you can tackle racism and have people from different cultures and countries living together.

However, on the journey we have made, we have sometimes made

mistakes. In the speech I made last year, I said there was a time when we had an approach that I would refer to as state multiculturalism: it was almost as if the state were encouraging people from different countries and cultures, instead of trying to integrate more and build a new home together. The state was almost treating them as separate cultures and entities in the country. That approach has been a mistake, so when I say that state multiculturalism has failed, I am not in any way saying that the idea and the delivery of a multiracial democracy is not possible. It is not just possible – we in Britain are showing how it can and should be done, as are many of the countries represented here. However, it should not be done through treating people as representatives of different blocs.

The Chief Rabbi in Britain has put it particularly well: we are not trying to create, he said, a series of different, segmented houses; we should be focusing on a home that we are building together. That also delivers a message that those people who come and live in your country are not just expected to assimilate into your culture: they are bringing something to your country that is going to be different and will benefit you as you build something positive together. So I say yes to the building in Britain of a multiracial democracy, but I say no to state multiculturalism that treats people as members of groups. We should treat our citizens as citizens – as individuals with full rights – rather than just thinking that they belong to a different bloc.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – The next question is from Ms Lundgren, who will speak on behalf of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Ms LUNDGREN (*Sweden*) – Mr Prime Minister, we welcome the Lisbon Treaty, which provides a legal obligation for the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. We noted the intense negotiations that have taken place since June 2010, showing that the complex technical and legal issues can be resolved. What is needed now is clear and unequivocal political commitment on the part of the 27 EU member states. Why is there a perception that your government is blocking this process?

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – We are not blocking the process, but it is important to recognise that the European Union's accession to the Council of Europe and the ECHR is an important step, and a new and different step. It is the first time that an organisation, rather than a country, has joined, so there are some complex questions that have to be worked through. Britain and other European countries that are signatories to the Lisbon Treaty are committed to answering those questions and working this through.

This perhaps goes back to the question I answered earlier. It may be boring, but we in Britain are great believers that you have to try and answer these questions in advance of signing up to something, and that is exactly the process we are going through at the moment.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – The next question is from Mr Kox, on behalf of the Group of the Unified European Left.

Mr KOX (*Netherlands*) – Thank you, Prime Minister, for your passionate

speech on human rights. In times of crisis – when there is an austerity policy, or a wish for speedier decision making – human rights can come under severe pressure. How do you view this threat, and how can we deal with it in order to uphold social and democratic human rights, especially in times of crisis?

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – Thank you. I think you make an important point. Post-9/11, we have all seen, perhaps particularly in western Europe, huge pressures on governments in dealing with the terrorist threat. It is important to remember how people and politicians felt in the immediate aftermath of those days, and the measures many European governments felt it necessary to take to safeguard their populations. This goes exactly to the point you are making: what is it in a system that helps us to make sure that governments do not overstep the mark and do not override important human rights concerns? That is where, clearly, there is an important role for the European Convention on Human Rights and for what our domestic courts do.

However, there is a balance to that, as well, as shown in the examples I gave. I do believe that you have to have an answer to the issue of the deportation of foreign nationals who come to your country who have no right to be there, and who are threatening your country. You have to be able to try them, deport them or detain them – you have to have an answer. You have to be able to do something to protect your people, and I fear that, at the moment, we do not have a good enough answer, which is why I raised that case. However, I completely agree with you: you need to make sure that government is government under the law, and there are times when governments – even governments with long democratic traditions – can overstep that line. It is important that you have legal and other processes, and checks and balances in your constitution, to prevent that from happening.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – The next question is from Mr Reiss.

Mr REISS (*France*) noted that the United Kingdom had supported President Chirac's 2005 proposal for a tax on plane tickets, and asked whether the United Kingdom would similarly support President Sarkozy's proposals for a tax on financial market transactions.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – I certainly agree with President Sarkozy that we should ask the financial sector and banks to make a fair contribution to the deficit reduction and fiscal programmes that we all have in our countries. In Britain, we have a financial transaction tax of a sort: we have stamp duty on share dealings, and yet we have one of the busiest stock markets anywhere in the world. So, I recommend this tax to other countries that want to tax their financial institutions more. We have introduced a bank levy, so we are taking about £2.5 billion off our banks every year. Again, this is an approach that works.

The problem I have with the financial transaction tax is that, unless it is

applied everywhere in the world, it will drive the activity to jurisdictions that do not have the tax. You do not have to believe me: the European Commission has produced an excellent report pointing out that this tax could cost EU countries more than 400 000 jobs. At a time when we are trying to pay down our deficits, get our economies growing and make sure there are jobs and employment in our countries, doing something that our own organisation, the European Commission, says would cost more than 400 000 jobs is an extraordinary thing to do.

I have great regard for Nicolas Sarkozy. We work very closely together on many issues, Libya included, but on this issue, we do not agree. Unless this tax were applied everywhere, it would have the effects that I mentioned, and that would cost jobs and cost investment in our own countries. Therefore, I think that would be a mistake.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – The next question is from Mr Agramunt.

Mr AGRAMUNT (*Spain*) asked what was the United Kingdom's position with regard to the following: the European Union, the Schengen Agreement, the European Monetary Union and the decolonisation process.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – On the issue of the Schengen treaty and the monetary union treaty, Britain is not part of either the single currency or the Schengen no-borders agreement, and we do not believe that it is in our national interests to be so. We think we should look after our own borders and we think we have some advantages from doing that.

Obviously, I want the countries in the single currency to sort out the problems and issues around the euro at the moment, but Britain is not a member and is not going to join. We think that we are fully capable of having our own currency and our own arrangements and of setting our own interest rates to suit our own economic needs. At the moment, with all the difficulties that we face, I think that that is more important than usual.

I am not sure whether the last part of your question was on Gibraltar or the issue of the Falklands, which has been raised recently. I have a very clear view: we should stand for self-determination, and as long as people in a part of the world that is part of the United Kingdom, effectively, want to remain with that status, far from being decolonialisation, it would actually be recolonialisation to go against their wishes, and that is the case in all those instances.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Mr Omtzigt.

Mr OMTZIGT (*Netherlands*) – Thank you for a clear speech in which you rightly placed on our member states the onus of taking a stance on the European Convention on Human Rights. How do you think Russia is implementing the Convention in general and in a particular case, the Magnitski case? In that case, someone was beaten to death after 358 days in prior detention, and numerous pieces of research indicate that he was tortured to death. Will you help the Russians to open a dialogue on how a

proper investigation and a proper prosecution can be conducted?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – The case that you have raised is extremely important. I raised the subject of such cases recently when I went to Moscow and met President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin. Cases such as the Litvinenko case in the United Kingdom and the Magnitski case in Russia are important, and clearly more progress needs to be made. I do not think that any country – whether it is France, Britain, Germany, Spain or Italy – should hesitate to engage with Russia and to have a relationship with Russia and its government, but the flip side of that is that we should never be coy about raising those important cases and pointing out that we all have an obligation to secure human rights and dignity in our own countries. We should raise those cases with other countries as well, and I have done so.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Mr Vrettos.

Mr VRETTOS (*Greece*) – Illegal migration to Europe, mainly southern Europe, has increased dramatically during the last three or four years. Given the burden that that places on our societies and all the ramifications that it entails, do you not think that the European Union should shape and pursue new policies based on solidarity and the need for countries to share the burden of an unavoidable humanitarian phenomenon?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – That issue often arises at European Council meetings. It is clear that the burden of migratory pressures has increased in recent years, and that it has had a particular impact on Italy and Greece. Malta also incurred a huge burden at the time of the events in Libya.

I think that there is a role for the European Union, and FRONTEX has played an important role. However, before we become involved in arguments about burden-sharing, we should look at the most recent figures showing which countries have borne the greatest burden in terms of the number of asylum seekers. They are northern European countries such as Britain, Sweden and Holland. I think that we should invest in the front end in trying to deal with the migration issue, rather than jumping on to the idea of burden-sharing, not least because countries might initially think that burden-sharing would suit them and later discover that that was not the case.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Mr Harangozó.

Mr HARANGOZÓ (*Hungary*) – In November, the Hungarian media reported that the Hungarian Government and your governing Conservative party were to establish a joint working group to examine the similar governmental measures in our two countries. In which fields would close co-operation apply? May I also ask whether you would encourage new and emerging democracies to follow Prime Minister Orbán's example and consolidate democracy and the rule of law?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – Britain and Hungary clearly have some common interests, including completing the single market in Europe, trying to establish growth in Europe, and trying to ensure that the trade agreements that Europe fixes with other, faster-growing parts of the world are concluded swiftly. The Hungarian Prime Minister and I have had, and will continue to have, discussions about those matters. Hungary currently has differences with the European Union over rights and democracy. Those will have to be resolved, and I am sure that they will be.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Ms Zohrabyan.

Ms ZOHRABYAN (*Armenia*) said that the UK was one of the largest investors in the Azerbaijani economy. Given that the Government of Azerbaijan was attempting to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by force, was the United Kingdom worried that their investment in Azerbaijan might be used to re-launch the war?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – Obviously we do not want that to happen. We are supporters of the Minsk Group and the process that is under way to try solve the issues surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. We hope that Armenia and Azerbaijan will be able to get together and do that.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Mr Nikoloski.

Mr NIKOLOSKI (*"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"*) – The United Kingdom is one of the most prominent members of NATO. As you know, the Republic of Macedonia was invited to the 2008 NATO summit, but the Greek Government vetoed its attendance. Can Macedonia expect an invitation to the Chicago summit this year, given the decision of the International Court of Justice that Greece has no lawful right to rule on NATO membership of the Republic of Macedonia?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – I support Macedonian membership of NATO and the European Union. I think that you are taking steps to embed democracy and the market economy in your country, and I think that we should be open to your membership of those important international organisations as part of that process. I know that there is ongoing debate and concern about the name. I hope that that can be resolved, and that the Greeks can see the situation from the viewpoint that they have things that your country wants. They are members of NATO and the European Union. They have those advantages. Membership has been helpful to their country just as it can be helpful to yours, and I hope that a resolution can be found that will give both countries the dignity that they require over the naming issue.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Ms

Mogherini.

Ms MOGHERINI (*Italy*) – So far, you and your government have said no to many different European proposals for ending the economic crisis, last but not least the new EU treaty and the financial transaction tax. What are your concrete proposals for solving the global crisis for which finance is largely responsible, and which has had such dramatic effects on people's rights and dignity?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – I do not accept for a minute that we have said no to any proposal that would help Europe to escape from its current difficulties, and I cannot see for a moment how a European financial transaction tax that is not imposed on the rest of the world could work. It might make us feel good for five minutes, but it would result in businesses and jobs relocating in other parts of the world outside Europe. It would cost us jobs and investment. I cannot remotely see what it could ever have to do with growing the European economy, and growth is what we need today. We need jobs for our young people, and we need investment. We need people to invest in the European Union rather than taking their investment out of it.

I believe that Britain plays an important role in Europe in pushing forward the things that would really make a difference. If we completed the single market, it would give a big boost to our economies and to jobs. The same would apply if we completed a single market in energy and in services. If we signed free trade treaties with India, South America, Canada and the United States, that too would make a difference. All those things are very much on the British agenda. I hope that we will be able to achieve some of them at the European Council on 30 January, and more during the rest of the year. We have a very positive and very engaged agenda.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Cameron. The next question is from Mr Avital, observer from Israel.

Mr AVITAL (*Israel*) – As the representative of the Israeli parliament, I am naturally keen to know your thoughts about the Middle East. The Middle East is no longer a code name only for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however crucial and important that may be. It now stretches from the Maghreb countries through Egypt and Jordan, and the unrest in Syria and Lebanon, all the way to the Iranian nuclear threat. How do you prioritise your concerns in the context of the Middle East?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Mr Cameron, would you like to answer that question?

Mr CAMERON – It is probably a mistake to prioritise such things in a "one, two, three, four" sense. It is not a good idea to pronounce on whether the Iranian nuclear issue is more important than another issue. We need to deal with all those issues. We need to put the maximum pressure on Iran to change its path and not to go down the road towards nuclear arms. We need to do all that we can to persuade Israel and the Palestinian Authority to continue the talks that started in Jordan and to resolve that process.

One very sensible remark was made to me. I was told that if we want to

heal many of the problems and divisions that have affected the Middle East in the past, we should start with the fact that al-Qaeda has come under enormous pressure and bin Laden is no more. That is stage one. We can see stage two in the Arab Spring and the growth of democracy and freedom in countries that have been condemned to dictatorship for years. Stage three would be a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict – a two-state solution with Israelis and Palestinians living alongside each other. If we achieve those three things in the early part of this century, we would have a more prosperous and more peaceful Middle East for everyone to enjoy.

THE PRESIDENT – The next question is from Ms Vésaitė.

Ms VĖSAITĖ (*Lithuania*) – Honourable Prime Minister, I have a feeling that the world is governed not by democratically elected parliaments and governments, but by the banks – and the majority of them are situated in London. My question is: What is your recipe for reconstructing the financial markets so that they invest not in casino games, but in the real economy?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer the question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – It is right to reform our financial institutions, and the British Government is doing precisely that. We started by ensuring that they make a fair contribution, which is what the bank levy is about. We had a major review, and we are going to separate the investment arms – what could be called the casino arms – from the commercial, lending parts of the banks, so that one is not threatened by the other. We also need much better regulation of our banks – not just in respect of the products they sell, but in the sense of macro-prudential regulation. That means the regulation of the level of borrowing in the economy.

I think the mistake made in Britain, and perhaps in other parts of the world too, was that there was not a sufficiently clear view about the massive over-leverage that was taking place. To be fair, it was not just the banks, as it also affected governments and households. It was this triple leverage that got so many of our economies into trouble.

It is not right to say, however, that everything is the responsibility of the banks. Many governments spent too much, borrowed too much and did not think enough about the future. We should not fall conveniently into the trap of thinking that we can blame the banks for everything and let all the politicians off the hook. We have to recognise that some of the problems that we face in Europe include not just over-indebted banks, but over-indebted governments. We need to deal with both of those problems. Even when we have dealt with over-indebted governments – this is one of the big arguments at the heart of the eurozone at the moment – we have to recognise that the other deficit that matters in Europe is not each country's budget deficit but the trade deficit of countries that are in the eurozone but not coping with its competitive pressures. That is a real part of the pressure at the heart of the system. If we think that taxing the banks some more and having austerity programmes for governments and others will solve the problems of the eurozone, we are making a very big mistake.

THE PRESIDENT – The next question is from Mr Leigh.

Mr LEIGH (*United Kingdom*) – Welcome to Strasbourg, Prime Minister. Is it not a problem that, as designed by its founders, the Convention was about how to deal with totalitarian governments? For instance, in the original Convention, the right of prisoners to vote was deliberately excluded. Now, however, the Court sees the Convention as a “living instrument”, so it is pursuing democratic governments and preventing them from carrying out the democratic wishes of their own people, instead of concentrating on real abuses in Europe.

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer the question Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – Thank you for your welcome. Having done Prime Minister’s Questions in the UK Parliament at 12 o’clock this morning, I must say that this is a far more civilised atmosphere – perhaps there are some lessons we can learn there! I do not entirely agree with the point about the European Convention. As I said in my speech, the Council of Europe and the Convention grew up at a time when Europe had to deal with recovering from totalitarianism and appalling acts against humanity. That was the original conception of the Court and the Council. As I said in response to Mr Omtzigt earlier, it is a living business in that some countries in Europe are going to have more routine abuses of human rights on which the Court should focus its attention, yet in all countries there are pressures on democratic politicians to take steps and measures, and we should all believe in a government under the rule of law. That is a profound point for all who believe in democracy and rights. Of course, the ECHR can have a role in overseeing that.

Now the focus should be on the most egregious breaches of human rights and on the countries and governments where that is happening the most. As I say, we should accept governments under the rule of law and the ECHR is part of that as I set out in my speech. Together, we can make some real improvements. This is an Organisation of complete unanimity; change will not happen unless we all agree. I hope that what I have shown today is that this change will come from a spirit whereby we want human rights to succeed and to thrive right across the European continent. We are acting in good faith to try to get reforms that will make this a reality.

THE PRESIDENT – The next question is from Mr Kaikkonen.

Mr KAIKKONEN (*Finland*) – I would like to put to you the same question that I put to President Tarja Halonen, as I would like to hear your opinion. If you look at a Europe from a global point of view, from outside, what does it look like?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer the question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – The honest answer is that it is a picture of two parts. People can look at Europe from the outside and they see democracy, great freedoms, a commitment to human rights – some of the things we have talked about today – and shared European values. We saw them last year and many other countries aspire to them. That is the positive part of the picture. The negative part of the picture is the economic picture. Right across Europe, we see slow growth or no growth. We see rising

unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, and we see economies that are struggling when other parts of the world – the Brazils, Indias, Chinas are growing very rapidly. That provides a challenge to our politicians, our leaders, our governments and, indeed, to our whole countries: are we prepared to allow Europe to stagnate economically while holding on to our excellent democratic and liberal values, or are we prepared to take the steps that will mean us having another great European century? I think we have to take those steps.

We have many things going for us economically; we have some of the best universities in the world; we are incredibly inventive and creative; we have some of the most extraordinary companies in all sorts of different sectors from pharmaceuticals to aerospace; we have the single market, which is the biggest in the world. We just need the political will to make the most of it, to take down the barriers, to get rid of the regulations, to make it easier to start a business, to make it easier to employ people, to make it more possible to grow, expand and succeed – as European countries have done in centuries past. I do not think that the dream of an economically successful Europe as well as a democratically developed Europe is over, but it is going to take a lot of boldness and courage at a time when the European economy is struggling and other parts of the world are growing. I am an optimist, not a pessimist. We know what the solutions to these problems are; we just need the boldness to grab them.

THE PRESIDENT – The next question is from Ms Bakir.

Ms BAKIR (*Turkey*) – The new law passed by the French Senate this week makes it a criminal offence to question publicly some disputed events during the First World War. The law relates to freedom of expression, the right to individual opinions and to conduct independent academic research on history. It is a political exploitation of history before the elections in France. What is your point of view on this new French law, which curtails a fundamental human right to freedom of expression? Should national parliaments legislate on history?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer the question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – I think it is difficult to comment on another country's laws which are passed by its parliament. In the UK, we have on occasion passed legislation that has looked back – making it possible to prosecute people for appalling war crimes, for example. I think that was the right thing to do. Our position on the issue raised is clear. Appalling things happened to the Armenian people; appalling atrocities were committed. It is important to state that, but we have to live in the present. I believe that trying to fashion stronger relationships between Turkey and all members of the European Union is in all our interests. Turkey is key to meeting many of the challenges that we face in the world, such as securing economic growth in Europe – an important topic, that we have just been talking about – or tackling the threat of terror and nuclear-armed states in the Middle East. If we want to demonstrate how Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu and Sikh can all live together, having a predominantly Muslim Turkey inside the EU is the right thing to do. I therefore profoundly believe that we should work on the relationship between Turkey and all European states, but in the end it is up to each individual European state, including France, to make up its own

mind about how to approach that. My commitment is very clear: I think the British-Turkish relationship is strong, and stronger than it has been for many years, and I am committed to further strengthening it.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – The last question is from Mr Assaf, Palestinian National Authority, Partner for Democracy.

Mr ASSAF (*Palestinian National Authority*) – Mr Prime Minister, your meeting with Mr Mahmoud Abbas a week or so ago left Mr Abbas quite pleased and satisfied. It has raised our people's hopes that the UK might be more assertive in pursuing the two-state solution. What specific steps might the UK take? Secondly, in October last year this Assembly called on all the Arabian countries who were members of the Security Council to vote in favour of the Palestinian state. What is the UK's position on this?

THE PRESIDENT – Thank you. Would you like to answer that question, Mr Cameron?

Mr CAMERON – Yes, I am afraid this will have to be the last question. Thank you for that question. It is good that we have now struck a balance as we have had one Israeli question and one Palestinian question.

Our position is very clear. We are strong supporters of the two-state solution. We want to see Israel democratic, secure and safe within its borders, and a new state of Palestine that can be a proper home for the Palestinian people. We will do everything we can to help bring that about. That is why I met President Abbas earlier this year. I also spoke to Prime Minister Netanyahu yesterday. The key this year is that talks have started in Jordan. We want those talks to continue. The problem is that those of us who want to see a solution to this issue cannot want it more than you two both want it. We need to do everything we can to encourage both sides to sit at that table and talk. I think that for the Israelis that means confidence-building measures so that the Palestinians know that they are negotiating with someone in good faith who wants to find a solution, and I think that for the Palestinians it means not setting out too many preconditions before the talks start.

In the end, the only way you can resolve the final-status issues – whether about Jerusalem, the right to return, or swaps – is by the Palestinians and the Israelis sitting down and talking to each other. All the rest of us can do is try to help bring that about. That is the commitment from Britain, a good friend of Israel, a good friend of the Palestinian people, and a supporter of the two-state solution, but we want you to talk this year, because every year that goes by is a year in which we miss the chance of a solution that would drain so much poison from our world and give the Palestinian people the homeland they deserve.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – That brings an end to the questions to Mr Cameron. I thank you most warmly for your address and for the quality of the answers that you have given. That confirms what I said earlier: I think that you are a great tennis player. Have a safe journey home.