



HOUSE OF LORDS

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Witness: Roberta Metsola MEP

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Members present

Baroness Prashar (Chairman)
Lord Condon
Lord Soley

Examination of Witness

Roberta Metsola MEP, EPP, MT

Q98 The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for your time this afternoon. Before we start, is there anything that you want to say by way of introduction?

Roberta Metsola MEP: I have been a Member of this Parliament for three years, almost to the day. My background is in European law; I am a lawyer by profession, and I worked previously for the Maltese Government, precisely on the area on which I work now, justice, home affairs, civil liberties and general treaty issues. I look forward to having an exchange of views with you. I have received nine questions from you, but if you would like to expand on that feel free to ask anything you would like.

The Chairman: Just for the record, I should say that this is technically a public session. It is being recorded, and there will be a transcript of our discussion, which you will be sent. If there is anything that you wish to change or correct, by all means feel free to do so.

Roberta Metsola MEP: So it will be a written transcript that is available online, not a voice recording?

Q99 The Chairman: Yes. Perhaps you can start by talking a little about the challenges faced by unaccompanied minors in the EU, and if they differ according to age, gender and nationality.

Roberta Metsola MEP: From a general point of view, the key challenge for most unaccompanied minors is to stay safe and out of the reach of criminals. I have done a lot of the research and preparation for this hearing, and I have looked at the numbers, which if you want I can share, discuss and go into detail on. Most minors, irrespective of age or gender, enter Europe with the help of smugglers. It is also based on gender that boys and girls face different specific risks. Boys make up the majority of unaccompanied minors, and there is the risk of them ending up in criminal gangs—that is the majority of them. They often engage in begging, whereas on the other hand girls face larger risks of sexual exploitation. On average, when it comes to unaccompanied minors, boys are slightly younger than girls. That probably reflects the social conventions in the countries of departure. There might be differences in the

risk that that these children face, according to nationality. The picture—and I hope to get into more detail as we go along—is still very sketchy. However, what is clear is that the risks exist and minors are exposed to danger irrespective of where they come from. We also need to understand the vulnerable position of children arriving in the Union. I use the word “vulnerable” with a purpose. We tend to have a lot of discussions in this house about the definition of “vulnerable” and who would fall within the category of being vulnerable. As a representative of the EPP group, I would tend to take a middle-of-the-road approach, whereby we always look at the persons seeking protection in the EU as individuals. We would always advocate for case-by-case assessment, and we have always advocated that it is the right of every minor to be treated as a child first, and then a migrant; that is important for us in looking beyond the statistics and looking into every single case to determine patterns of entry, if possible.

Here in the European Parliament, we have called on member states fully to apply the specific provisions of the common European asylum system. With regard to unaccompanied minors, I have worked on a couple of reports, including access to legal assistance, guardianship, access to healthcare, accommodation and education, the right to be spoken to in a language that the child understands and—this is something that we insisted on—the right to be interviewed by properly trained officials. This is important when looking at countries that do not have experience of migration or huge influxes; the training of the persons examining minors when they cross the border is crucial in making the distinction between children and adults. Something that I also wanted to mention is that it is often difficult to ascertain who is a minor. Many persons applying for protection claim to be under the age of 18; in fact, a large number of them are older, so we need proper age assessments to be carried out, as long as they are carried out in the least invasive manner possible. They should respect integrity and dignity and be performed by independent and qualified practitioners and experts.

Q100 The Chairman: That is very helpful. Obviously, there has been a migration crisis in Europe. How has that affected the unaccompanied children? In your opinion, what should the EU’s response be—or has it been effective?

Roberta Metsola MEP: The overall approach from EU member states facing the refugee crisis has never been more evident than last year. It has been lacking; many member states have reacted too late, and politicians have reacted too late, with half-baked emergency measures aimed simply at solving emergency situations, thinking that this is a transitory phenomenon and a phase. We have realised that we have to go beyond that; migration is not a passing phenomenon, and we must tackle it with a long-term vision.

The refugee crisis has also clearly had an impact on the number of minors entering the European Union. We can see a sharp rise; for example, I have seen the figures from 2013 to 2014, and I can only imagine what the final numbers from 2015 will be. That has been fuelled mainly by the conflict in Syria. Within the Parliament we have argued very strongly and advocated for a strong and effective system of resettlement, which means that we take the people in need of protection directly from the third country that is unsafe, then a relocation system would be established that fairly distributes those children in Europe among member states. I continue to believe—and this is another very sensitive and divisive subject within this House—that resettlement is one of the strongest forms of allowing safe entry for persons in need of protection, and will serve to destroy the traffickers' models and business empires. But at the same time, those member states that advocate for resettlement to be the only way for entry cannot ignore the fact that there will still be people trying to come in irregularly, at the borders, and how they come in has to continue to be tackled. It is also true that the steady increase of arrivals of minors has placed a very heavy burden on agencies and the facilities of those responsible at the border, particularly with those member states that do not have a history of tackling large influxes. That has led to a reported shortage of guardians for minors, limited educational facilities available at reception centres and longer periods of uncertainty while these minors are awaiting procedures, or all the phases of the procedures throughout the processing of their asylum applications. However, the EU institutions and agencies have become more active over the years. In fact, we have seen some streamlining and to a certain extent harmonisation of procedures, rules and guidance and training to professionals in the field. This was done based on evidence gathered in a number of member states with experience in dealing with unaccompanied minors. We would also say that recent proposed improvements by the European Commission on the arrival and entry procedures for migrants across external borders should help to facilitate the situation for minors.

Finally, co-operation between authorities and the voluntary sharing of information is still very limited with regard to missing children. We would like the states to gather disaggregated data on the situation of refugee and migrant children to be able to improve the ability of systems to integrate such children. There are still too many children going missing, as we have seen from the latest figures given to us by Europol. Once they enter the Union, we simply lose track of them. You could say that there is a lack of political will to track them, or a lack of means of control; I think that it is a little bit in the middle, and we need to do much more. We have an ultimate duty to keep the best interests of the child as the main priority at all costs. When it comes to unaccompanied minors, this has to be the crux of our argument, and it is important

that we send the message that when it comes to children we expect the highest standards of care, irrespective of their status.

The Chairman: You said that the Commission has updated some of its guidance, based on good experience of some member countries. Which are those member countries?

Roberta Metsola MEP: We have looked, for example, at models used by Italy and Malta in dealing with arrivals by sea. I believe that the Commission also looked at the Swedish and the UK models, and the training needed for certain questions to be asked of minors when they arrive. How they arrive is different, depending on the geographic location of children and the means of transportation. For example, it has looked into eastern European routes with children being packed into trucks. It has also looked at arrivals of children in the south, where they were not necessarily sent by themselves—we are seeing now an increase in the number of children being sent where parents hope that at least one of their many children may be saved. But in our case we would see children who had been saved while parents had drowned on the way. Those are some of the experiences that were looked at—how to deal with the trauma of a child having left north Africa with their parents and arriving with nobody and no relatives on the boat.

Q101 The Chairman: Can we move on to the role of the European Parliament in addressing this issue and your role as an MEP? What should the European Parliament be doing?

Roberta Metsola MEP: I sit on the committee that deals directly with this matter. We have identified a number of Members from each political group who are very keen on the subject. There is an intergroup for children and the working group for children's rights, which I participate actively in. We would like to see a more specific focus on minors in this Parliament. We tried before the last European Parliament elections to have a committee dealing only with children. The reaction that we got from the European Commission and the European Parliament structure is that we deal with such an issue horizontally. However, we have found that that means that it is bundled up with a raft of other immediate and pressing problems and the matter of unaccompanied minors has been given far too little attention. What we have tried as a result of that is to adopt a number of resolutions and reports on dealing with unaccompanied minors, the latest one being my own report, which was voted on two weeks ago in the plenary in Strasbourg. This was on a holistic approach to migration. We got a lot of questions as to why we called it a holistic approach to migration, but the reason was that we had seen too much of a fragmented approach by the European Union on migration, with the persons dealing with relocation solidarity, for example, not talking to those dealing with neighbourhood policy, with development aid, with home affairs and

trafficking—smuggling in particular. In no way were they discussing integration measures for migrants who enter the territory and are granted protection, nor which method of integration is necessary to prevent the ghettoization and the rising level of fundamentalism that we are seeing in our cities among persons who were born within our territories and have felt excluded from the society that has brought them up, leading them to kill their own and destroy their own society. So what we would need to deal with and what we tackle in this report, which maps out the vision of the European Parliament for the next few years over the rest of the legislature, is search and rescue, return, integration, destroying trafficking gangs, helping to address the root causes of migration, helping states outside Europe to build capacity, resettlement, relocation, addressing the flaws of the Dublin system—which I shall be working on in the next few months—and seeing how to deal then with those in need of protection and those seeking work in Europe. On unaccompanied minors specifically, we understood and we stated that there is no silver bullet in dealing with the challenges that such children and the member states that host them face. However, we have made it clear that we will move away from the wishy-washy, two-page resolutions that we are used to adopting, to actually tackling problems head on. We have created, to go back to my original point, quite a good group of active Members of the European Parliament, three of whom you have just met, who are dealing with these matters directly.

The Chairman: You said your report. Is this a report of the committee of which you are a member or is it your personal report?

Roberta Metsola MEP: I was tasked by the European Parliament to draft a report, which is a strategic initiative report. On every mandate, the Parliament identifies three or four key areas—migration is obviously the top one—and additional resources are allocated in order for there to be an in-depth report, which took the best part of a year to negotiate and discuss, with the result that we have a 27-page, very detailed report. I have copies of it with me if you would like to see it. It was adopted by 459 votes in favour in Strasbourg by the whole Parliament. It originally went through my committee, where I presented it together with an Italian socialist colleague of mine, Cécile Kyenga. It went through very well with a very big majority in committee—a considerable majority considering how divided this house is on such a matter. But the message was that we start with the principle of solidarity and look at what is practical and what can actually be done. We went a little bit further than just accusing the member states of not doing enough, which tends to be the rhetoric of this house, by identifying humanitarian admission, humanitarian visas, the possibility of creating legal routes for vulnerable persons to come in—such as resettlement, and looking at integration as a

two-way process, whereby you are granted protection but are expected in return to respect the values on which a country is built. We went further than we have done in many other areas, but the level of engagement by this European Parliament was unprecedented in this area throughout this report. On a 27-page report, we had more than 3,000 amendments and it took a long time to negotiate, but we came up with a compromise that went through with a significant majority.

The Chairman: So within the report, there is the dimension of the unaccompanied minors.

Roberta Metsola MEP: Yes, there are several references to children which we can identify after this meeting if you like, where we seek—I would not call them carve-outs from existing legislative acquis—specific rules that apply to unaccompanied minors, especially when we are dealing with the general criticisms of a credible migration policy, which are pull factors, secondary movements and asylum and forum shopping. We look at identifying genuine asylum applicants and understanding, as we said before, that when we are looking at unaccompanied minors we are looking primarily at children.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. We look forward to reading that report.

Q102 Lord Soley: You have clearly done a lot of careful analysis on the structures and policy issues and so on, and this follows from that set of questions. To what extent have you—both of you individually and Parliament as an institution—been able to get the views directly from unaccompanied minors? It is not easy to do.

Roberta Metsola MEP: As you say, it is definitely not easy to do. However, I have spoken throughout this process to various non-governmental organisations that work on the ground, whether in Greece or Italy so far but also in Germany, Finland and Sweden—countries that have been faced with an unprecedented number of unaccompanied minors crossing into their territory. I have got a lot of requests that we should have better exchange of best practices and of information between police authorities in order to keep track of children who are trafficked into slavery or begging once they come in; one does not exclude the other. There are also a number of governmental entities that have started to work with NGOs, but you are right that it is extremely difficult, and beyond the ones that I met in Malta and north Africa I have had to rely on information that I received from NGOs working on the ground in the reception areas for persons fleeing the Syrian conflict.

Lord Soley: Do you think it is possible or desirable for Parliament as an institution to find a way for you to talk more directly to unaccompanied minors, because, as important as the NGOs are—and they are very good at it—you are still listening to the translator of a child's voice to you as people drawing up the rules?

Roberta Metsola MEP: Yes, between 16 and 19 May, in fact, we have what we call Green Week, when MEPs should be back in their constituencies, but our committee has decided to organise a number of visits to Turkey and Greece specifically to meet with minors. However, it is not easy, because it is one thing to meet minors who still have to flee regions of conflict, and another to meet minors who are being cared for in camps. We have had colleagues who have been to Turkey and to Syria in this regard, and we have been pressing for similar visits to Jordan and Lebanon, where we know that there are a lot of unaccompanied minors who are being cared for by the community or the specific camps in which they reside.

Lord Soley: What about groups of MEPs seeing unaccompanied minors in the EU countries?

Roberta Metsola MEP: We expect all our Members to visit unaccompanied minors in their own countries. I spoke about Malta, for example. I have met them there on the basis of arrivals from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. I have also spoken to Belgian MEPs, because to meet them here you would need to have minors present in Belgium, and for them to present in Belgium we would need to co-ordinate with the Belgian authorities, but point taken—especially because Belgium has faced a larger influx of minors from Germany on foot who are joining family and relatives here. We will look into it.

Lord Soley: I will leave it there. I would just say that one problem for people in this situation, and not just for youngsters, is that you are not picked up by the elected representative in the same way as a constituent would be. It just depends on how willing an MEP is to go out and look for that aspect.

Roberta Metsola MEP: Yes, it also depends on what level of involvement you have with the migrant communities in your country—and also, ultimately, on the way MEPs are elected, although that is probably a subject for another day.

Q103 Lord Soley: What about the human rights of unaccompanied minors? How are they affected by member states' failures to implement the asylum acquis fully?

Roberta Metsola MEP: As I said in reply to the first question, the key thing is for member states to fully implement the asylum acquis. If we do not do that—it is still surprising that every six months the European Commission commences infringement proceedings against up to 18 member states for not fully implementing it. It is not necessarily about unaccompanied minors. However, the reality is that there are still a lot of failings in reception facilities, qualifications, access to services et cetera. We are also waiting for another impending spike in arrivals, leaving aside the EU-Turkey arrangement, through other routes. The reality is that Europe's member states all come from a different tradition of border controls and asylum procedures, and some member states have much more ground to follow in order to comply

fully with the *acquis*. Also, we should never underestimate the social, economic and geographic difficulties of some of our member states, especially on the southern borders. Bearing that in mind, if there is a failing on their part to fully observe the *acquis*, we would expect those member states to accept those failings and accept help when they need it. Over the past few years, we have seen that that is not always the case; some member states would prefer to disregard certain rules and regulations under the *asylum acquis* so that they are not obliged or forced to implement them further down the line in order to escape statistical truth, and we have to bear that in mind. Ultimately, however, once a Government accept a legislative arrangement and vote in favour of it in the Council of the European Union, the least one would expect is that that they would then implement it.

Lord Soley: Might I suggest as a lawyer that if your presumption is that they do not, sooner or later you must act in some way, such as putting pressure on them to conform to the rules they voted for?

Roberta Metsola MEP: The latest coastguard proposal is a direct result of that; a member state refused help. I am not talking about individual island communities that are faced with an overwhelming influx of persons requiring protection, but there are situations, which are catered for by the current legislative framework, that would, for example, suspend the application of the Dublin regulation if your absorption capacity was at a maximum. But that, of course, requires the political will to accept that your absorption capacity is at a maximum, and once your absorption capacity is at a maximum you are also presuming that member states that are far away from the crisis stop exonerating themselves from responsibility over this crisis. So let us turn the tables a bit on member states that are not facing an impending crisis.

Lord Soley: Do you want to name any of them?

Roberta Metsola MEP: I am not in the game of naming and shaming, but the statistics are there.

Q104 Lord Soley: Finally, what steps would you suggest the EU take to encourage co-operation among member states in addressing the problem? I am thinking particularly of the question of missing unaccompanied children, because clearly the figures for those who are missing are underrepresented—in my view, anyway.

Roberta Metsola MEP: Absolutely. The saddest part of all this is that when we talk about numbers we are told that they are just a fraction of the reality. With children it is important to work to restore their trust in our systems and to do so in ways that have proved to be effective, such as the early provision of trained guardians or proper foster care. We have had a lot of

experience in Malta with foster families caring for children who come in after having the extremely traumatic experience of being in a boat that has capsized in the middle of the Mediterranean. As I have said, our authorities have learned to overcome that first shock of having to deal with something and to adapt, and we have extremely good training, also provided in certain situations by the UK Government.

As an aside, when Malta first joined the European Union in 2004, when coincidentally Malta started to deal with the arrivals, our armed forces and our navy had no language experience for identifying countries where migrants were coming from, and the UK Government provided quite a lot of help to the Maltese Government in the form of language trainers who are trained in this area and persons with the medical expertise to determine the age of minors.

In the case of missing children, we need to redouble, or more, our efforts, because far too many disappearances from reception centres are either never reported or frankly take too long to be reported. Furthermore, certain information systems in different member states are incompatible, which means that when numbers or trends are sought the data extracted in member states is sometimes not comparable.

We also need to look more closely at the possibility of using our existing measures and methods more effectively by including more biometrical data, pictures and fingerprints in our databases. European authorities could then investigate these cases more effectively. There are a lot of discussions of course as to whether such measures should be applied to children. That matter is still not resolved, but ultimately I have always believed that the collection of information is key to finding out what is going on on the ground and to furthering and improving co-operation particularly between member states that have common borders.

Of course, the reverse of doing that is the Dublin regulation being used to send people back to their first point of entry. There have been situations in which unaccompanied minors are returned to the member state they first entered where they have absolutely no link; it is just that they had to turn up in that member state because it was the member state that it was the most possible to enter. They have been granted protection, made their way across the continent to meet family relatives, the authorities of that member state have found them and realised that they have an expired travel document from the first member state of entry, only for them promptly to be sent back to a detention centre or reception centre—it depends on whether member states have a practice or otherwise of detaining minors—to be sent back to a country where they have absolutely no link. That is a big discussion. Again, it is very divisive, but in the case of minors there tends to be a bit more understanding that you should

seek family links if you do not want minors to slip out of the system and become so vulnerable to exploiters.

Q105 Lord Condon: Earlier on, you mentioned guardianship schemes and the potential shortage of guardians. Has Malta adopted a guardianship scheme? How do you think it is working? We would welcome your wider views on guardianship.

Roberta Metsola MEP: I am not a representative as a Government, but I can just tell you from an outside point of view about the system that we use. Every minor is placed under a care order and assigned one social worker to act as a guardian in the child's best interests—so there is one social worker per child. Children are not placed in detention; they are assigned specific housing and accommodation. To my knowledge, the system seems to work well; it allows children who arrive and are rescued a chance at something resembling normality, with foster families. We have had situations whereby minors were discovered in reception centres. We have also had situations when migrants arrive; they are not the legal carers of the child, coming on the boat, but they have effectively taken over. In that situation, we have had cases whereby social workers have determined that it is better for the child to remain within those familiar surroundings, even though the adults taking care of the child are not his or her legal relatives. That takes a long time to determine, because you never know—and the Government have always been very careful in making sure that the child is not subject to abuse. There were single, individual cases of that having happened.

In my view, an effective guardianship and child-sensitive protection system are key to preventing abuse, neglect and exploitation of children who are deprived of parental care. This should be the key driver for action when it comes to guardianship schemes, not just in Malta but across the entire Union. I have heard examples of children in states across Europe who still end up detained like criminals or kept in open facilities without any support. That is also quite dangerous for children, who could end up being subject to sexual offences within such open facilities. It is extremely important to be sensitive to nationalities, ages and genders of persons being cared for in one open facility.

Q106 Lord Condon: It has been suggested to us by one of our own Ministers that these needs can be taken care of by foster parents, care workers and a more diverse approach. Are there some really good common ingredients of guardianship that transcend that general care approach that should be implemented throughout Europe?

Roberta Metsola MEP: I would tend to agree with that analysis. I have met children who have been taken in by foster families, and their lives have been completely turned around. I would put pressure on individual Governments, including my own, when the fostering process

takes quite a long time, in the sense that it takes a long time until you are granted permanent fostering. That sometimes means that the children are kept in community facilities for longer than would be ideal. Of course, it is easier to determine the age of a minor when a child is under the age of 10, but it becomes more complicated when you are talking about 12 to 15 year-old boys. The numbers of families coming forward to foster are lower, and the risks or difficulties faced are bigger. In that situation, we would need to look into practices of member states that have a longer experience of children. I know that France is working on developing programmes on a community level. We are still far away from identifying best practice in this case, and we need to go to community level to identify the needs for that community.

Q107 Lord Condon: Can I move you on to the family reunification directive? What are your views on the strengths and weaknesses? What benefits have been derived from it in Malta? Do you accept that there might be adverse consequences? Some people have suggested that families will send unaccompanied children to trigger the directive, in an irresponsible way.

Roberta Metsola MEP: Again, I represent the opposition, not the Government, but as far as I am aware the legislation has been transposed and implemented in line with the recommendations provided by the Commission in its 2014 communication, in the application of this directive. To my knowledge, the family reunification directive has not had an adverse effect in Malta. Needless to say, it has seldom been implemented, because the measures are triggered after a certain period of time. As for the adverse consequences, I do not sympathise with the so-called pull factor argument. We hear it all the time; it is very easy for politicians like me to use it to gain votes and basically resonate with what could be perceived as fears in your community. However, emphatically, I believe that we are dealing with push factors rather than pull factors—of war, terrorism, extreme poverty, and others. When we have identified and interviewed the parents of such children, they have told us, “If your house is on fire you leave and, if you cannot leave, at least you try to save one of your children”. That will happen irrespective of any system that you put in place to protect any family reunification legislation—and that is mostly what we are dealing with here. Of course, as with any system there are abuses, and those abuses have to be tackled. The pattern should be identified, if there is one. However, we should not move away from the bigger picture. In countries such as mine, when there was extreme poverty in the 1950s and 1960s, parents would do anything, and would send their children alone to other countries in the world, if they knew that that child had the chance of a better life.

Q108 Lord Condon: Finally, from me—and we asked your colleagues earlier on about this issue—on the EU action plan on unaccompanied minors for 2010 to 2014 and the equivalent

agenda for the rights of the child, again for the same period, should those documents be renewed? Did they achieve what they set out to achieve. If they are going to be renewed, what should be their focus and priorities?

Roberta Metsola MEP: The European Commission has an action plan on unaccompanied minors, which has made it easier systematically to pool knowledge and share best practices, both between member states and, more importantly, between member states and the EU institutions and agencies. It has also aided and provided somewhat more reliable data on the numbers of unaccompanied minors entering Europe and combined and connected the tools at the disposal of the concerned authorities. The EU agenda for the rights of the child that you mentioned certainly contributed to the protection of children's rights and their treatment in the asylum process by leading to 11 concrete actions. However, I agree that the action plan should be renewed. While the agenda for the rights of the child has yielded some very valuable results in the form of directives and concrete actions in the field, it could be reviewed as a package to enshrine the proper treatment of such young unaccompanied children across the European Union. As you know, action plans and agendas are not binding on member states and serve simply to pool information and identify recommendations and tools—especially after what we saw last year, with different member states' reactions to the crisis, as persons were knocking on their door. So we could create rather more forceful recommendations, even though they are not binding, for authorities to be guided by, especially now, for example we are creating a completely new EU border and coastguard.

On Thursday in the LIBE committee we will vote on new common rules for trafficking in human beings—they are an update of the current directive. One amendment proposed, which my group supports fully, is that we grant the border and coastguards access to the Europol database. It is something that director Rob Wainwright has advocated for many years. Frankly, the crisis of last year and the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels—and to a certain extent the incidents in Cologne on New Year's Eve—have brought home a need to have much better sharing of best practice and an urgent need for authorities from various member states, especially those member states that have a common border, to co-operate more than ever to make sure not only that we have all the tools at our disposal but that they are used.

Q109 The Chairman: I would like to ask a final question. As you know, we are undertaking this inquiry. From your point of view, what would you like to see in this report by way of recommendations which you think would influence the European Union?

Roberta Metsola MEP: Who else have you inquired of besides me?

The Chairman: We have taken evidence in the UK from UK Ministers, non-governmental organisations, law enforcement agencies and local authorities. Here, we are meeting MEPs and some of the NGOs. It would be useful to hear your perspective.

Roberta Metsola MEP: I think that you should be as critical as possible and not pat on the back. After three years in this house and, before that, eight years working as a lawyer for my Government, I have seen that we spend too much time in this city detached from the reality on the ground. You are closer to the reality on the ground than a number of civil servants within these institutions. I take comfort in the fact that I come from a system where I am directly elected, which means that I need to go back to my constituency every week where I am constantly asked questions such as the ones you pose to me. That means that I am kept on my toes making sure that I seek balance in every policy decision I take—and balance is key. Coming from the centre of this house politically, I consider myself with an advantage of being able to put to good use the values according to which I was elected and according to which I ran. I would like to move away from populist rhetoric to concrete action—very nice words, but so far we have seen too little of it.

Lord Soley: Sorry. Had you finished?

Roberta Metsola MEP: I never finish. I could continue on and on. I suggest to you that you come in whenever.

Lord Soley: Let me ask you a short question to follow on from our Chair's question. Are there any one or two things that stand out in your mind that ought to be recommendations that are made about the EU's policy on unaccompanied minors?

Roberta Metsola MEP: As a Maltese, I would say solidarity. There is far too little of it.

Lord Soley: Between the countries. So you would need greater co-ordination between the countries.

Roberta Metsola MEP: Not only co-ordination. We need political will. We need to have fewer European Councils, where 28 Prime Ministers come in and leave to give 28 press conferences on how that Council or summit was a success for the negotiating position of the country. Everybody is an elected politician and, of course, it is in everybody's interest to say that. But it would be so much better and so much more visionary if we had member states' Prime Ministers who said, "Today, I have understood member state X's plight, and I have agreed to help that member state". I would like to see the same level of solidarity as was shown during the economic crisis, because it is a matter that goes much more deeply to our values as a European Union. Nothing makes us more of a Union than 1 million persons waiting on the north African border to come to Europe, no matter what happens to our laws,

no matter what we do. For them, they would like to seek a better life. Whether and how we decide to ensure that those who are eligible for protection are granted it require much more solidarity than we have seen. I was my country's expert on the Lisbon treaty negotiations—I used to sit next to Paul Berman—in 2007. I remember that all of us around that table—27 of us at the time—said that it was quite apt that the word solidarity in the Treaty of Lisbon is mentioned in the chapter on justice and home affairs. You would think that the legislators' intention in putting “solidarity” there was that that would be where it was ultimately shown. I have seen nothing further from that over the last year and I would like to see more.

The Chairman: That is a very good point to end on. Thank you very much indeed. It has been a pleasure listening to you.

Roberta Metsola MEP: I have just been told that I mentioned there being almost 3,000 amendments to my report. To the final report, there were 1,300 amendments. It was in general throughout the negotiation. As you can see, my lawyer assistant is asking me to correct it.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. We look forward to reading your report.