



## Debates

Tuesday, 4 May 2004 - Strasbourg

OJ edition

### ► Freedom and security for Union citizens



► **Ārviļš (PSE)**. – (LV) The European Union – and today I finally have the right to say ‘our union’ – has been transformed from an economic union into what we call a union ‘based on values’.

The increasing diversity of cultures, languages and religions is undoubtedly one of those basic values. Human rights are universal and they must be extended to everyone without any discrimination on the grounds of sex, age, material status, ethnic origin, mother tongue or citizenship. The rights of national minorities are an inalienable component of fundamental rights.

Let us be honest, serious problems in this sphere remain in both the old and the new Member States, including my own country, Latvia. These issues were included in the Copenhagen criteria for accession. Experience will show how successfully these criteria are met, but what will happen next?

I believe that we must move on from the rhetoric of human rights to a permanent and practical involvement, we must achieve the adoption of mechanisms for monitoring legally binding statutes and their implementation. A very important step in this direction has already been taken. It has already been mentioned today that the draft Constitution included a Charter of Fundamental Rights and that the draft Constitution makes reference to minority rights. In particular the adoption of a Directive on racial equality must be noted. These, however, are just the first steps.

I am looking at the theme of our discussion today, ‘Freedom and security for Union citizens’. Within the area of European freedom and security, freedom, security and equality must be provided for all – even refugees, immigrants and guest workers. We have a big job ahead of us. I believe that we, the elected representatives of Europeans, in cooperation with other European organisations, primarily the Council of Europe, will be able to successfully resolve this extremely important challenge.