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FIFTY YEARS OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE: BUILDING EUROPE WITHOUT DIVIDING LINES

DANIEL TARSCHYS

Daniel Tarschys is Secretary-General of the Council of Europe

When in September 1989 the late Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, he referred to the “common European home” mentioned by President Mikhail Gorbachov two and a half months previously in his speech to the same Assembly. Mr Özal stressed that it could only be a democratic house based on pluralism. He continued: “However, we cannot have a common house by just having a juxtaposition of different rooms. We should all be able to move freely from one room to another. For that to be achieved, we have to start by strolling in the same garden. In this context, one should recall Abraham Lincoln’s saying: ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ In other words, the members of the common house should share common ideals and values. They should be able to communicate with each other so that disputes are resolved by peaceful means. They should all have common aspirations and objectives for the future of Europe.”

Mr Özal’s address was given a few days before the beginning of the collapse of communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe, a few weeks before the break-down of the Wall which artificially had divided the common European home.

Eight years later, in October 1997, at the Council of Europe’s second Summit of Heads of State and Government in Strasbourg, the then Turkish Prime Minister, Mr Mesut Yılmaz, called for a Europe that, in its process of integration, should not create new dividing lines. He further stated that Turkey was amongst the Council of Europe’s oldest members and would continue its efforts to contribute to the realisation of the organisation’s aims and ideals. He expressed the hope that the second summit would constitute an important step on the road to a united and free Europe, to a democratic Europe for all. Indeed, together with Prime Minister Yılmaz, 43 other heads of state and government reaffirmed their countries’ commitment to the key principles of the Council of Europe.

When in October 1998 ten European personalities, under the Chairmanship of the former Portuguese President, Mr Mario Soares, presented their report on the future role of the Council of Europe they chose the title ‘Building Greater Europe without Dividing Lines’.

This was a most significant decision because it describes in one phrase the basic mission of the Council of Europe around the turn of century and in the decades to come.

The Council of Europe was set up in 1949 in the conviction that peace and prosperity must be secured through reconciliation and co-operation between European states, on the basis of shared values and common principles.

We have, indeed, come a long way along that road. Ten years ago, after the end of the Cold War, we believed perhaps that we had come even further. But since then we have seen violence erupt in different parts of the continent, and now the twentieth century bids us farewell with a repeat performance of some of its worst horrors and follies: nationalism, religious fanaticism, terrorism, ethnic cleansing and massacres.

Vukovar, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Chechnya and today Kosovo, show us that again all the evil spirits have been unleashed. But this should only harden our resolve to base our future on the defence of human dignity, respect for the individual, the rule of law and pluralist democracy.

THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A EUROPE BASED ON FREEDOM AND DIVERSITY

It might be useful to look back briefly at the way in which the building of a united Europe began. The standards applied at the time may no longer be a universal yardstick—but they enshrine basic values and political guidelines that have lost none of their validity. The passing of time and our ignorance of things we have not personally experienced may have pushed them to the back of our minds.

Yet, in spite of all this, the post-war European credo remains as important as ever: Never again a Europe given over to totalitarian terror and war, but a Europe of peace and freedom.

After Winston Churchill's 1946 Zurich speech and the 1948 European Congress at The Hague, the setting-up of the Council of Europe was the first political and practical step on the subsequent path of European co-operation and integration.

The Council of Europe began on 5 May 1949 with ten founding-member states signing the organisation's Statute, which commits the signatories to the respect of pluralist democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This made it an organisation with a clear political and ideological alignment. Political pluralism instead of totalitarian structures, the respect and defence of individual liberties instead of collectivism and ideological intolerance, the absolute priority of the rule of law instead of the rule of the party have been, from the outset, the political credo of the organisation, combined with the mandate to promote co-operation amongst its members in all fields of daily life, with the exception of defence.

This is where the idea behind the Council of Europe really came into play in the past, and still does today. The Council became the organisation working on a comprehensive range of levels, i.e. its co-operation structures include governments and national parliaments, representatives of local and regional authorities, as well as active forces representing civil society, including experts from universities and other specialised institutions.

By engaging in a wide range of practical intergovernmental co-operation activities (culture, education, sport, youth, environment, health, social affairs, media and equality) and by elaborating, up to now, 173 European conventions, the Council of Europe contributed largely to establishing a common European legal area.

The first thing that this Council of Europe concept involves is the generation of mutual understanding and trust. The second is working out agreements together as a basis for shared standards and principles on many societal issues. Finally, action to promote regional and

trans-frontier co-operation in all its forms will rob borders, so often regarded as sacrosanct, of their fundamental historical significance.

These were the recipes that worked on the long, hard road to move Europe. From its earliest beginnings, in the late 1940s, the Council of Europe worked within, and provided an institutional framework for a policy and daily practise of confidence-building measures, long before that term became part of an East-West relations vocabulary.

Indeed, democratic governance—starting with local self-government—facilitates the acknowledgement and respect of existing differences, be they ethnic, religious, linguistic or other; it values the diversity of the population and it allows the building of a flexible political and administrative system that manages the differences in a positive way.

Furthermore, democracy in its many forms can provide tools for the effective management and transformation of deep-rooted conflicts. Democracy-building leads to a process of peace-building. Again, the history of the Council of Europe provides us with a most striking example in this respect.

When the Statute of the Council of Europe was signed on 5 May 1949 at St James's Palace in London, the UK Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, suggested Strasbourg as the headquarters of this new and first political post-War organisation for intergovernmental and interparliamentary co-operation.

The choice was very symbolic. A border town in a region that had often been fought over, conquered and reconquered, between two neighbouring countries; what better place could there be to mark the beginning of a new era of reconciliation, understanding and co-operation?

Today, the Rhine is still a border but it has long ceased to be a barrier. Co-operation along the river is intense. Four decades ago in the Upper Rhine valley a regional co-operation framework was developed, the so-called 'Regio', which became one of the most significant examples and models of trans-frontier co-operation in Europe.

Two main lessons can be drawn from this. First of all, history does not always repeat itself. Democracy is a decisive peace-building factor. Democracies tend not to make war against each other. Second, the building of Europe must start from the bottom at the local and regional levels. The vitality of trans-frontier and regional co-operation is the true expression of the idea of a citizens' Europe.

The Council of Europe's contribution to overcoming the horrors and avoiding the errors of the past lay in the fact that the fundamental values and co-operation patterns acknowledged by all—democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to which the practice of market economy has to be added—existed not only on paper, but became more and more of a reality for all the European partners and their populations belonging to the organisation.

The promotion of these fundamental values constituted its intrinsic specific mandate and *raison d'être*. In its essence, the Council of Europe is an alliance between its members for the defence of these principles. To that end, it has established a system of collective enforcement of respect for human rights through mutual control. Since its origins, the protection of human rights therefore no longer belonged to the exclusive domestic sphere of member states, but became a legitimate concern for all of them, individually and collectively. In bringing its member states ever closer together

through their equal participation in common activities to promote the implementation of its principles in response to changing challenges, the Council of Europe fulfilled its statutory aim of achieving a greater unity between its members. It contributed to creating and sustaining a culture of concrete and purposeful co-operation throughout Europe.

SECURING AND CONSOLIDATING THE NEW EUROPEAN DEMOCRATIC AREA

A new Europe began to emerge in the autumn of 1989. Our present efforts to find the right structures to guarantee its peace and freedom can trace their origins to, and indeed draw invaluable lessons from, the achievements recorded and the setbacks encountered in the first decades of post-war West European co-operation.

In July 1989, in a speech of notable political significance before the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg, President Gorbachov declared his acceptance of the Council's basic democratic values and described the organisation as one of the main pillars of the European home which he envisaged. He also said that the Soviet Union was still a considerable way from these basic democratic values, and so looked to co-operation with the Council of Europe to speed up the process of internal reform.

Gorbachov's acceptance of the basic democratic values upheld and championed by the Council of Europe sent a political signal to all those working for reform in the Soviet Union and in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. Indeed, his speech took place three months before Hungary decided to allow the citizens of the German Democratic Republic to leave for freedom in the West, and four months before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Contacts with the Council of Europe were established almost immediately by the new democracies, and membership of the Organisation then became an important first step, on the 'way back to' Europe for some states, on the 'road towards' Europe for others.

A New Generation of Conflicts

At the end of a century that had seen decades of nationalism, totalitarian rule and ideological division in Europe, we now found ourselves witnessing a profound political desire for re-Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, the genuine desire to become part of Europe was accompanied, in many Central and Eastern European countries, by the rediscovery of national identities. They, unfortunately, often expressed themselves by their ugly and aggressive side of nationalism.

Once the pressures of an imposed military alliance, the structures of a centralised state and single-party rule had been removed, suppressed internal tensions broke through to the surface. Many of these had their origins in unsolved problems relating to minorities. The new nationalistic tendencies found their most terrible expression on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and in the Caucasus.

After the traditional inter-state conflicts of the past and a long period of cold war, Europe became confronted with intra-state or regional conflicts, often identity conflicts based on a multiplicity of elements (race, religion, culture, heritage, language, history, economic frictions, etc.) and frequently

very complex and persistent in nature.

Even if these conflicts are more limited in scale than the ideological or geopolitical struggles of the past, they may obtain greater intensity and they certainly require a full range of flexible and adaptable instruments to tackle them, taking into account the complex and deep-rooted underlying interests.

The transition to democracy was challenged by a considerable number of real and potential conflicts. As a result, national or regional idiosyncrasies have been introduced into broader multilateral frameworks and have become one of their constituent elements.

However, the membership of the new democracies in international organisations was helpful to promote mutual respect and in so doing to foster partnership, co-operation and integration for the purpose of solving shared problems.

A Community of Values among Equal Partners as a Way of Securing and Consolidating the New Democratic Area

The Council of Europe offered the shared roof for a common European home. Since 1990, enlargement became a political fact of life for the organisation with seventeen new members from Central and Eastern Europe joining during the subsequent years until April of 1999. Others are on the waiting list for membership.¹ The declaration of the Council of Europe Vienna summit of 1993 already stated: “The Council of Europe is the pre-eminent European political institution capable of welcoming, on a equal footing and in permanent structures, the democracies of Europe freed from communist oppression. For that reason the accession of those countries to the Council of Europe is a central factor in the process of European construction based on our Organisation’s values.”

Of course we are aware that the process of Europeanisation is a rocky road, requiring endurance and perseverance, but also new ideas and creativity. This was already the case in the aftermath of World War II, and it is today even more difficult, given all the many after-effects of between 50 and 70 years of totalitarian power structures.

When in autumn 1989 the reform initiatives in a restricted number of Central and Eastern European countries suddenly turned into a huge general movement of political change, the Council of Europe at once declared its willingness to actively support the process.

i. The basics of democracy and the rule of law

Providing a full range of information for decisions about which democratic political structure, which legal system, which mechanisms of human rights protection would best suit particular needs, became a priority activity for an organisation with over four decades of experience in the development and strengthening of democratic governance.

Together with a comprehensive body of legal instruments, norms and conventions on democracy and human rights, the Council of Europe had accumulated considerable experience for the development of sustainable, durable and flexible structures of dialogue and governance. On this basis, it put in motion a variety of co-operation programmes covering, inter alia, constitutional reforms, action to bring legislation into line with the European Convention on Human Rights, human rights education, training programmes for law officers (from attorneys general to prison wardens), prison reform, the

organisation of free elections, media legislation, the building of democratic structures (starting with local government), the development of a civil society, minority rights and action to promote confidence-building measures between conflicting communities.

This Council of Europe work aims at consolidating the common basis for a free and democratic society. This also influences the economy. There can be no growth without political stability. Stable democratic institutions and a functioning legal system are essential preconditions for investment and economic development.

Solid democratic governance and legal harmonisation, for which the Council of Europe is striving, combined with a general strengthening of European awareness, thanks to the variety of its other activities, smooth the way for those seeking access to institutions and decision-making structures with a greater supranational element, such as the European Union.

ii. Overcoming the burden of history

The promotion of European awareness is also part of the collective process arriving at political stability and democratic security and putting the past behind us. This is fundamental to a new confidence in, and a new understanding of, Europe.

What is needed is not just a common educational approach to give a new understanding of Europe, but also a common effort to agree, if possible, on an unemotional and objective version of history. Narrow nationalistic stereotypes remain great dangers to European stability.

In Western Europe in the decades following the war, it was only possible to achieve reconciliation, to build confidence and to create ever closer co-operation structures by laying bare the mistakes and horrors of the past. So it is today urgently necessary, from the Balkans to the Baltic and beyond, to tackle this problem of putting the past behind us and achieving an understanding of the course of history from different perspectives.

I would include this among the tasks to which the Council of Europe must give the greatest priority.

iii. Awareness of the common cultural heritage

Even very recently we have been frightened to see that there still exist very exclusive conceptions of history in terms of national heritage which can lead to dangerous results: to intolerance, to denial of minority rights and to outright aggression. Armed conflicts have involved not only accidental damage and looting of the cultural heritage but also its systematic destruction, acts of ethnic cleansing combined with a blind hatred directed also against the religious and architectural legacy.

These risks of exaggerating the national reading of our history and taking it to dangerous extremes underline the need for broader perspectives on the cultural heritage, the need for a European reading of our history.

In the European reading of our history, there is emphasis on the cross-fertilisation between different cultures, on the manifold contacts between different countries, on the enrichment of our heritage through contributions from various sources.

In the European reading of our history, we take pride in the diversity of our heritage and accept as an

asset that many different peoples have contributed to the civilisation of every single corner of our continent.

And with a European reading of our history, it follows clearly that the preservation of the whole of that legacy is our common responsibility.

In their Final Declaration at the Second Council of Europe Summit in October 1997, the heads of state and government showed their awareness of the educational and cultural dimension of the main challenges to be faced by Europe in the future as well as of the essential role of culture and education in strengthening mutual understanding and confidence between European peoples. They expressed their desire to develop education for democratic citizenship based on the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Subsequently, on 7 May 1999, the Committee of Ministers adopted a declaration and programme on this subject. They also reaffirmed the importance they attach to the protection of "our European cultural and natural heritage" and to the promotion of awareness of this heritage; they, therefore decided to launch a campaign in 1999 on the theme 'Europe a Common Heritage' respecting cultural diversity.

Listening to the debate on European co-operation and integration, you can easily get the impression that all that counts is trade and military defence. These are indeed of vital importance. But if we ask ourselves what it is that in the long run can create genuine cohesion between Europeans, I am convinced that it is neither military guarantees nor economic relations. It is rather the sense of belonging to a common frame of reference, of sharing a common heritage and a common destiny.

This awareness of Europe's common roots gave birth to the concept of European integration. It can be neither understood nor realised without reference to our system of values based on the uniqueness of the human being, on respect for life, human dignity, civil rights and liberties.

iv. Investing more in democracy

Until recently, security policy had above all a military connotation and meant protecting your country against external aggression. But present perils are predominantly domestic, often rooted in a combination of economic problems and identity-related conflicts. In order to challenge successfully such domestic perils we need a solid political basis and a civilised society, backed by forceful democratic institutions. This basis is weak in some parts of Europe, perhaps weaker than we thought only a few years ago.

There is an urgent need to be more adamant in the support of democratic government, civil education, a stronger civil society and respect for human rights.

Furthermore, we now have a unique opportunity to achieve peace, security and stability throughout Europe through democratic means based on the rule of law. We should therefore invest increasingly in measures promoting reconciliation and confidence. As part of this, we should strengthen democratic culture and the necessary educational action, as well as the associated institutions.

More funds for the strengthening of democratic security will make it possible to reduce expenditure on military matters. Must we really continue to invest so much in defence as we did during the Cold War? Or should we not shift some of these resources towards preventive measures, which cost incomparably less but may be much more efficient in the present situation?

It seems to me that investing more in democracy is not only the more rational but also a necessary strategy to ensure Europe's economic and political future.

Today's tragedy in and around Kosovo reminds us again of the missed opportunities of the past.

A Too Rapid Process of Enlargement?

The enlargement transformed the Council of Europe in the 1990's. All throughout this process, there were voices that claimed that the Council was selling its soul and that its principles and basic values were being diluted.

Such criticisms are widely off the mark. The Council of Europe has made an important contribution to the democratisation process by welcoming the new states, but also by making strong demands. Never before have defending and preserving our principles and basic values been discussed so widely at the Council of Europe as they have been in the last few years.

And never before has member states' compliance with their obligations been monitored so closely—a process which starts with the supervisory machinery of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The European Convention for and Court of Human Rights are today an integral part of the new European public order. This was clearly stressed when the New Single Court was inaugurated on 3 November 1998. Respect for human rights is no longer a purely internal matter for each of the 41 member countries. The Strasbourg Court provides a judicial remedy for 800 million people from Reykjavik to Vladivostok.

The independent European Committee for the Prevention of Torture inspects prisons, police stations, camps and mental health institutions, to watch over the respect of the Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

In the most sensitive area of minority protection, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities have been elaborated. Both of them entered into force early 1998 and the control mechanisms that they provide for have been established.

The process is taken further by the monitoring procedure introduced by the Parliamentary Assembly, which has set up new structures of its own to make sure that all member states are honouring their obligations towards the organisation and the Assembly discusses this question regularly in its committees and at its plenary sessions. Also relevant here are the work and debates of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, which contributes in its own area by helping to ensure that democratic practices are followed at local level and the rights of minorities respected.

In their work, both assemblies go public through their debates in plenary, which gives them considerable political authority.

The Committee of Ministers has also developed a monitoring procedure that is totally unprecedented at the Council of Europe and would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. This is a remarkable development in an international organisation where individual member states are jealously protective

of their national sovereignty.

The multiplicity of the levels on which the Council operates has made it possible to devise a many-faceted warning and control system, which has a self-monitoring element, but is also largely directed at the public—which makes for fuller democratic control.

But criticism alone is not enough. The Council of Europe is not afraid to point fingers where needed, but it remains, above all, an association of like-minded states that seek co-operation, dialogue and mutual support.

This development of monitoring mechanisms makes it clear that talk of diluting the Council's basic values is highly misleading.

We are not giving up even one iota of the Council's convictions, principles and basic values. On the contrary, the Council clings even more firmly—and for all its member States—to respect for its fundamental standards: pluralist democracy, the rule of law and protection of the rights of individuals.

I am firmly convinced that the Council is not at all in the process of selling its soul, but is making its own important contribution to reshaping Europe. And it is doing this in a more comprehensive all-European political context.

CONSOLIDATION OF A FREE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY THROUGHOUT EUROPE BY JOINT ENDEAVOUR

Over the last five decades, and in particular by the present crisis in and around Kosovo, we have learnt that there could be no lasting peace and stability without democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including minority rights.

An Inclusive Europe

In the new Europe that is uniting, we must also avoid developments which might lead to societies divided into two or three classes or to instances of inclusion or exclusion.

We must use every means at our disposal to prevent such a development, which would create new political isolation and fuel nationalist ambitions that usually find their expression in situations of conflict with others.

The overall policy of European stabilisation and subsequent unification requires coherence and an effort to avoid possible feelings of discrimination.

The transitions to be shaped in our contemporary new Europe are, of course, more complicated.

The first step is to overcome the old geographical and ideological dividing lines, such as those between Western and Central and Eastern Europe. Co-operation structures for the geographical Europe, but also pan-European thinking, must bind the countries of Europe together.

This includes, generally speaking, all the institutions active in the European area, such as the OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO, European Union and Western European Union. They must adapt to the

facts and needs of the new Europe.

The Acceptance of International Rules and Standards

The era of superpower rivalry was characterised by containment-oriented strategies of coercion and the political actors of the Cold War period focused rather on short-term stability than on long-term sustainability.

Today's variety of conflict situations shows the need for a full range of flexible and adaptable instruments, which still include crisis management faculties but which also call for basic democratic, legal, economic, as well as cultural and educational building blocks for putting in place sustainable, durable and flexible solutions to the variety of societal challenges.

There is the growing importance of the Council of Europe for the 'Europeanisation' of its members by providing a body of legal instruments and accepted rules and standards accompanied by a concept of comprehensive co-operation. This concept comprises the greatest possible number of forms of co-operation, across national borders between states, regions and municipalities, between ministers and parliamentarians, and also including academics, professional associations and groups within civil society, in every area of community life, ie. first and foremost between human beings.

However, the Council of Europe has to fulfil its mission in concert with other organisations. The Europe free of dividing lines requires a coherent policy for European co-operation and unification. If it is to succeed it must lead to a solid community of partners into which each feels tightly knit. This obviously needs increased 'concerted action'.

Mutually Agreed Multilateral Action

In practice, Council of Europe co-operation with the European Union, particularly on the implementation of reform programmes in the new democracies, has developed in a very satisfactory manner over recent years.

There has also been steadily increasing co-operation with the OSCE in different areas of tension. Given the overlap in mandates and membership, there are ample needs and opportunities for co-operation between the two organisations. Pragmatic co-operation in a spirit of partnership will help to achieve mutual reinforcement and complementarity. We have made considerable progress along this path.

We have also increased the circle of regular information and co-operation to tripartite meetings between the OSCE, Council of Europe and the Geneva-based UN agencies (UNHCR, ECE, Human Rights Commissioner, etc.). The formula of the interlocking institutions, ie. the OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO, European Union, WEU, as well as specialised UN bodies, must become a daily reality. It must become clear that all the democracies of Europe, and their transatlantic partners, are actors in a common overall plan of stability and security.

I believe that Winston Churchill's vision of 1946 has lost none of its appropriateness. His call to the European family of peoples to come together in a structure where they can live in peace, freedom and security finally, fifty years later, has realistic chances of being achieved.

In contrast with 1946, we now have a network of multilateral, regional and local cross-border

co-operation structures at our disposal, with an already considerable amount of experience. It is up to those who bear political responsibility to make the best possible use of these co-operation structures between like-minded equals.

Long before Winston Churchill proposed the setting up of a Council of Europe, his compatriot William Penn suggested the creation of a European Assembly. Writing in 1693, Penn insisted that to attain peace and stability in Europe, such an assembly should include both the Ottoman empire and the Principality of Muscovy. Today, it is vitally important that the many successor states to these powers, and in particular such countries as Turkey, Ukraine and Russia take an active part in the consolidation of the European project. Each one of these states brings to our common endeavour a rich cultural heritage, marked by centuries of interaction with other parts of the continent.

Complementary Sub-regional Action

In addition to the absolute necessity of 'concerted action' between the great regional organisations, increased attention must be given to multilateral co-operation projects on a sub-regional level, be they trans-frontier activities in the form of Euro-regions, or wider regional joint activities involving a multitude of countries.

The Council of Europe considers these initiatives as complementary to a wider European effort to bring about a concept of comprehensive co-operation, lasting stability and security in the respective regions. Ever growing and enlarging co-operation breaks down uncertainties. In this way, dangers to security are reduced and finally neutralised.

As a Swede, I cannot but draw attention to the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers as models for sub-regional co-operation, and as long-lasting examples of achieving ever greater unity among a certain number of like-minded neighbouring countries.

Coming back to one of the present major European crisis areas, the Balkans, I would like to refer to two prominent examples, the Central European Initiative and the South East European Co-operation (SEEC) process, in particular. The latter has the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia amongst its members.

Turkey, which recently handed over the chairmanship of the SEEC process to Romania, submitted a most interesting draft for a charter on good-neighbourly relations, stability, security and co-operation in the Balkans. The preamble includes some essential commitments, such as:

- The political will to pursue the SEEC process on a mutually beneficial and equal basis and with a spirit of solidarity,
- The importance of promoting in the region universal democratic values, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities,
- The present historic opportunity for the development of good neighbourliness, co-operation and stability, created by the elimination of political and ideological divisions in Europe,
- The European orientation of the SEE countries as an integral part of their political, economic and social development,

- The strong belief that European integration, which is essential in promoting their common objectives, cannot be complete without participation of their countries.

This approach is fully in line with the concept developed in the present paper and clearly indicates the importance of the 'European orientation' in all searches for peace, reconciliation and stability in South Eastern Europe as an integral part of the common European project.

The Council of Europe as an Organisation of Equal Partners

The Council of Europe second summit in October 1997 symbolised the new-found unity of Europe. The general acceptance of this new, and fortunate, situation of Europe had been echoed by President Boris Yeltsin, when he addressed the Summit: "We are now poised to begin building together a new, greater Europe, free from division lines:

- a Europe where no state would impose its will on others;
- a Europe where big and small countries are equal partners united by common democratic principles."

In this process, the integrating force of the Council of Europe will continue to play a useful role.

When it acceded to the Council of Europe in August 1949, Turkey joined the European project in its very early stages. It has been a faithful member since with an often very delicate geopolitical situation as a direct neighbour at the south-east border of the Europe under communist rule and of the politically unstable Middle-East region. It was at the forefront of the Western Alliance and of the European family of democratic nations.

Turkey made traditionally important contributions to the intergovernmental and interparliamentary activities of the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe itself, of course, was never indifferent to Turkey's concerns with regard to social and other problems linked to the migration of millions of Turkish citizens to countries of Western Europe and open to all initiatives and actions related to the fight against intolerance and xenophobia.

However, as it happened, and will still happen in the future also with other member states, developments within Turkey have here and there provoked discussion, raised criticism and even led to condemnation within various Council of Europe co-operation and decision-making structures, be it the Parliamentary Assembly and its public debates, be it the Committee of Ministers and its confidential internal political dialogue, be it the European Court of Human Rights acting as the control mechanism of the European Human Rights Convention or the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture as the independent supervisory body of the relevant convention.

Despite the fact that this should be considered as normal business within the circle of like-minded countries that practise amongst themselves a critical dialogue linked with mutual support, public and published opinion often presents this as an interference from outside in purely internal matters.

This is, however, an outdated approach. Within the Council of Europe, there are no internal affairs as far as human rights and democracy are concerned. If these issues are 'internal' they are internal to Europe—and Turkey is as much a part of Europe as any other member state of the organisation.

Modern Turkey, in the tradition of Kemal Atatürk, has long been a European partner. Its early membership in the Council of Europe was a clear expression of this orientation. This policy has been further confirmed with Turkey's membership of NATO, the Black Sea Economic Co-operation structure, the South-East European Co-operation process and the OSCE. Turkey should be recognised as an important, responsible and equal actor within the European project.

As the other member states, Turkey is committed to respect and defend democracy, the rule of law and human rights. These matters are no longer internal affairs, they are European questions or problems and Europeans must share the responsibility to safeguard these principles and values, no matter what their nationality or origin is.

Turkey can be proud of its 75 years as a modern republic. But it remains confronted with considerable problems causing it concern for its internal cohesion and national integrity.

No one in Europe should underestimate these concerns. The temptation of an introverted self-isolation still remains, but I am convinced that the country will choose, finally, to retain and further develop a European strategy based on our values and our common experience.

A European Organisation in Harmony with National Sovereignty

We have seen the Council of Europe as a forerunner in making the collective protection of human rights a common goal of its sovereign member states. They freely accept the supranational jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights as a guarantee for democratic governance and the pre-eminence of law.

With regard to the consolidation of the process of European construction through increased intergovernmental co-operation activities, covering a wide range of sectors relating to legal co-operation, social and health questions, culture and education and matters related to the foundations of democracy, including pluralism of the media and minority rights, the Council of Europe offers all European countries participation on an equal footing in the development of the European project.

In doing so, the Council of Europe offers a flexible framework for common initiatives and action in areas where states wish to keep sovereignty firmly anchored at the national level, but where, nevertheless, European co-operation is needed. Its expertise and experience in a wide range of co-operation sectors represent a unique asset among European political organisations. I fully share this description provided by the Soares Committee in its recent report.

To sum up my own presentation of the Council of Europe's evolution as an active element in the building of a new Europe without dividing lines, I would like to refer further to the observations made in this report:

“As a pan-European organisation, the Council of Europe constitutes an appropriate structure for political dialogue, allowing all European states to participate on an equal footing in the discussions and decisions on European affairs in its fields of competence. The Council of Europe has a general political responsibility for peaceful unification and democratic stability based on its key role of defending human rights, the rule of law and democracy. This must be expressed more clearly by taking a stand whenever there is a threat to respect for the rule of law. Bearing these considerations

in mind, we consider that it is unnecessary to pursue any theoretical discussion on whether the Council is a political organisation, a standard-setting institution or a framework structure for intergovernmental co-operation and assistance programmes. These aspects of its work are mutually reinforcing and inseparable.”

EUROPE IN THE HOUR OF KOSOVO

Within the concert of the European institutions and organisations, it is a special responsibility of the Council of Europe to defend the common values and the wide horizons of the European project; to stand for particular dimensions without which this project would be sadly incomplete—ethical, spiritual, moral, social and cultural.

Half a century of European co-operation is, therefore, not a moment for nostalgia; Europe—and in particular a wider Europe without dividing lines—is more than ever our common project, it is our common ambition for the future.

Ambition and conviction are needed if today, in the light of the tragic events in south-east Europe, there can be no denying that recent European history is still replete with missed opportunities. When hundreds of thousands of refugees are squeezed out of Kosovo, we cannot but ask ourselves what we could have done differently over the last ten years—and what we must do differently in the next ten years to avoid repetition of similar tragedies time and time again in different parts of our continent.

Action is necessary immediately. The Turkish proposal within the SEEC for a charter on good-neighbourly relations, stability, security and co-operation in the Balkans is an important regional initiative. It is complementary to the initiative for a stability pact for south-east Europe, which should strengthen the joint efforts and expertise of the wider multilateral co-operation structures such as the European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE and the various competent UN Agencies.

For the long-term contribution by the Council of Europe, I would like to add the following reflection.

At one time, there was certainly widespread apprehension in our different countries that a stronger sense of European identity might undermine national identity, and thus weaken the citizens’ attachment to their own states.

Today, we know that this is not true. We have learnt that identities are not mutually exclusive. They can be cumulative. These issues are indeed sensitive, but if they are handled with care and common sense they need not be at all disruptive. Regional, ethnic, religious and other identities can flourish very well without posing any threat to national identity.

And so can the European identity. But more than that: strengthening the sense of European identity in all parts of the continent is a means of laying old fears and old conflicts to rest, of dispelling the evil phantoms from our collective past, and of replacing inherited prejudice by a spirit of respect and co-operation. So many problems could be solved if only hundreds of millions of us learnt to think and act as good Europeans.

How can we develop this common consciousness, this attachment to our fundamental values? If that is now the main challenge, the Council of Europe has much to contribute. What has been achieved

through our cultural co-operation and our work in the field of education may serve as miniature models for the full-scale action now needed.

Creating Europeans—that should be the agenda for the next half century. If we fail in that task, we will fail in many others also. But if we succeed, as we must, we will bequeath to future generations a much better Europe than the continent that we inherited from our ancestors.

1 Armenia and Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Monaco. Belarus and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have introduced requests for membership to which no follow-up has been given by the Committee of Ministers until now.