realities and dreams

René van der Linden
“The Council of Europe is as relevant today as it ever was. It plays an indispensable and unrivalled part in steering Europe in the right direction. Its work is necessary for Europe and necessary for the European Union.”
Jean-Claude Juncker
Prime Minister of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg,

★★★

“I consider the Council of Europe to be a school for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. It contributed immensely to my political philosophy. I also consider the Council of Europe to be a permanent network for promoting and disseminating ideals of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.”
Abdullah Gül
President of the Republic of Turkey, then Prime Minister, Strasbourg, 27 January 2003

★★★

“The Council of Europe is clearly among the most prestigious institutions on this continent. For well over half a century, it has served as a standard bearer of democracy and human rights, on this continent and well beyond.”
Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Strasbourg, 23 June 2005

★★★

“Our organisations are based on the same principles and values and have the same goals. We want to build a more dynamic, rational and coherent Europe, based on shared values.”
José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission, Strasbourg, 11 April 2006

★★★

“With [the] leadership [of the Council of Europe], the parliaments of Europe have adopted some of the most progressive national legislation to combat different forms of violence against children, including sexual exploitation, trafficking and corporal punishment. Your efforts can serve as a model for others.”
Ann M. Veneman
Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), Strasbourg, 23 January 2007

★★★

“The European regional human rights system is the envy of the world. It has achieved much that you can be proud of, but the report on the state of human rights and democracy paints a bleak picture of failed promises, lost opportunities and gross abuses. This Assembly sets the moral compass of Europe.”
Irene Khan
Secretary-General of Amnesty International, Strasbourg, 18 April 2007

★★★

“The Assemblies of the Council of Europe and of the European Parliament are united by the same objectives – freedom, democracy, peace and law – and are not in competition.”
Hans-Gert Pöttering
President of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 25 June 2007

★★★

“The Council of Europe, which binds 47 states with different cultural, ethnic and religious identities, [faces the] challenge of supporting the forces of co-existence – forces that believe in ‘live and let live’.”
Rabbi Arthur Schneier
Founder and President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, Strasbourg, 27 June 2007

★★★

“The Council of Europe has made some new, unprecedented steps towards bridging relations with religious communities. In our sight it is the long-awaited response to many calls of religious leaders.”
Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and all Russia, Strasbourg, 2 October 2007
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Europe’s moral authority is determined by our actions

Foreword

For the last three years, I have had the great honour and privilege to chair the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – an eminent democratic body expressing the voice, the will and the dreams of the citizens of greater Europe.

My vision of Europe has been that of:

- a Europe as a value community: where people strive to protect and promote the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
- a united Europe: without dividing lines, where all countries participate on equal footing, on the basis of mutual respect, understanding and cooperation;
- a diverse Europe: where peoples, cultures, languages, traditions and religions coexist, interact and form together the extraordinary richness of our Continent;
- a tolerant and open Europe: strong by its principles and values but also reaching out to the rest of the world in a spirit of dialogue and understanding.

During my mandate, my greatest priorities have been:

- to concentrate on the core business of the Council of Europe;
- to strengthen its role as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;
- to promote co-operation with the European Union;
- to involve fully the civil society and encourage people-to-people relations.

The Council of Europe has an indispensable role in providing a European house for all the countries on our continent and in overcoming and preventing new divisions in Europe through bridge-building and parliamentary diplomacy; this is why I have also strongly promoted a strategic partnership with Russia.

These three years have been a challenging, inspiring and passionate experience, especially thanks to the contributions and ideas of all Assembly members, as well as to all the political leaders in member and partner countries, to international organisations, religious leaders, NGOs and students and everybody else who has lent us their cooperation, support and friendship.

The work of the Assembly also depends on its secretariat. Despite being small in numbers, it makes a remarkable contribution to the substance and smooth running of the Assembly’s work. I wish to thank all its members for their contribution to the success of my presidency.

I owe a special word of gratitude to the present and former members of my Private Office, whose competence, political sense and commitment in a multitude of diverse and highly sensitive situations has been of great support to me throughout my mandate.

With the end of my presidency, the journey is not over. 800 million Europeans continue to expect us, their elected representatives, to introduce and defend in their lives the values that the Council of Europe stands for. I hope that we shall be able to continue our work together.
It was a great opportunity for me that the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe took place almost at the beginning of my mandate (Warsaw, 16 and 17 May 2005). The summit reaffirmed that the Council of Europe’s core, statutory objectives are the preservation and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Member states committed themselves to enhancing the Council’s role as an effective mechanism for pan-European co-operation in this field, in order to ensure the development of a Europe without dividing lines.

However, as the Assembly pointed out in its Recommendation 1712 (2005), the ultimate success of the Third Summit depends on the follow-up given to the decisions taken in Warsaw. The implementation of these decisions was therefore a matter of priority, both for the Assembly and for me personally.

An extremely important result of the meeting which took place during the Summit between the Presidential Committee and the Bureau of the Committee of Ministers was to ask, at the Assembly’s initiative, Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, to draw up a report on the relationship between the European Union and the Council of Europe (see more on Mr Juncker’s report in Chapter 6).
For me, the main challenges that lie ahead for the Council of Europe in the coming years are:

- Firstly, to ensure the practical implementation of our principles, built on values, in the everyday lives of citizens. This includes the right to live in dignity, which is fundamental to me.

- Secondly, to ensure that our standards are respected by all and in the same manner. There should be no double standards.

- Thirdly, to further develop a common legal framework for the whole of Europe. There must be no more dividing lines in Europe.

- Fourthly, to be more convincing to our citizens. We must respond to their needs. Therefore, we must strengthen the parliamentary dimension and work more closely with civil society.

- Fifthly, our key Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights, is in serious danger because of the ever-growing backlog of cases before the Court. We must save it from collapsing.

- And lastly, we have to avoid duplication and waste of money.
Annual report on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe

I consider the launching of this report one of the Assembly’s greatest achievements during my presidency. Its realisation became possible thanks to the hard and highly competent work of the Assembly committees, in the first place the Political Affairs, the Legal Affairs and Human Rights and the Monitoring Committees which prepared the three main parts of the report, but also all the other Assembly committees which contributed to it, as well as other Council of Europe bodies and international NGOs.

With the first of our Annual Reports, the debate on which took place on 18 April 2007, we launched a unique new initiative. It provided an excellent platform for demonstrating the leading role of the Council of Europe as the guardian of human rights, democracy and the rule of law Europe-wide. The texts adopted on this occasion by the Assembly summarise in snapshot form the Council of Europe’s role; they are a useful reference tool for policy-makers within the Council of Europe and at national level.

The synoptic presentation of the Council of Europe’s principal monitoring mechanisms and institutions in an appendix to the report, and the participation of the heads of all these mechanisms and institutions in the debate itself, were an important vehicle for giving visibility to their activities, which are generally not known beyond a limited circle of specialists. At the same time, the participation of the heads of leading NGOs introduced into the debate a healthy critical note, counterbalancing any temptation for complacent self-congratulation.

Following the Assembly debate, I invited all our national parliaments to hold their own debates on the report, so as to ensure that governments take these issues much more seriously both at home and abroad. We also strived to establish closer relations with national parliaments’ human rights committees, to ensure systematic co-operation and more effective follow-up to Assembly recommendations, including the Annual Report. I hope that our report will also be an inspiration to human rights teaching in schools and universities, and to NGOs, journalists and others.

The careful evaluation of all the lessons learnt from this first exercise, on the basis of comments that all participants provided at my invitation, will hopefully improve further subsequent debates. The Annual Report can and should be the pan-European reference in the field of human rights and democracy.

Mr Marty’s report on secret detentions and unlawful illegal inter-state transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states

Whilst attending the Warsaw Forum for the Future of Democracy on 3-4 November 2005, it was brought to my attention that the American media were reporting allegations of secret CIA detention centres in certain European states. I immediately realised the political significance of these allegations and the fact that, concerning respect for human rights and the international rule of law, they fell fairly and squarely within the core business of the Council of Europe. It was also clear to me that the Parliamentary Assembly had inherent advantages for enquiring into these allegations.

I therefore requested that the Assembly’s Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights launch an enquiry. Mr Dick Marty, its chairperson and a highly experienced Swiss prosecutor who had worked on large-scale anti-mafia cases, was appointed rapporteur.
A statement adopted by the Standing Committee set out the framework and purpose of the enquiry, as follows:

“The Assembly stresses that the purpose of the inquiry is to establish the truth and to prevent such situations happening again; it is not to “accuse” or to “sanction” one or more countries. Violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and other basic human rights norms cannot be permitted. A clear and strong message must be sent: even in the name of the “war on terror”, illegal and inhuman practices in relation to the arrest, transportation and detention of persons, even if they are suspected of terrorism, cannot and will not be tolerated in any member or observer country of the Council of Europe. Human rights violations in the fight against terrorism are counterproductive and may instead give terrorists – whose aim it is to undermine our open, tolerant and law-abiding societies – a victory that we all agree they do not deserve.”

These remained our guiding principles throughout.

The two reports adopted by the Assembly in June 2006 and June 2007 received unprecedented media coverage and attracted intense political attention at the highest levels. It is important to note, however, that the “Marty report” was prepared not by a special investigative committee with an extensive secretariat, but by the small, at the best of times understaffed team of the Legal Affairs Committee. I do not think it inappropriate for me at this point to repeat that our organisation cannot reach its full potential when pursuing its core business if member states withhold the necessary means.

For my own part, whilst I could not assist the Rapporteur directly, I continued to do my utmost to strengthen his political and institutional situation, especially in the early months as his activities began to have a serious political impact and to attract sometimes negative attention from increasingly nervous national governments and their allies.

On 2 December 2005 I wrote to the US Ambassador in Paris, requesting a meeting with Secretary of State Rice during her then-forthcoming visit to Europe and urging full US co-operation with our enquiry. On 14 December, I wrote an open letter to the US Congress concerning the related issue of the “McCain amendment” (intended to prohibit abuse of detainees by US personnel), followed by a public statement welcoming President Bush’s apparent acceptance of the amendment on the 16th.

Also in December, I met the European Union’s High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Mr Javier Solana, in Brussels, taking the opportunity to urge him to co-operate fully with our enquiry and to use his office and influence to ensure that other EU institutions did likewise: I was pleased, therefore, that he extended his full support to our work. The same month, I gave interviews to the British national television news stations Channel 4 News and to CNN, providing information on the progress of Mr Marty’s work and stressing the importance of full co-operation from national authorities.
Alongside these, I made constant reference to Mr Marty’s reports, at all stages of their preparation, in speeches, press conferences and official meetings. Clearly it is to Mr Marty that respect is due for his tremendous commitment and efforts, but I am glad that, as President, I was able to support his work and contribute to its impact and success.

Although the European Commission’s Vice-President responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security Mr Franco Frattini had stated that the European Union did not have the necessary legal basis to investigate the allegations, from the outset he offered his full support to our work. Representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission participated in the committee’s deliberations and the European Commission provided essential data, which could not have been established by our committee on its own. I welcomed the setting up of a European Parliament temporary committee to investigate the matter and responded positively to its interim report, adopted in June 2006, expressing my satisfaction with the close and fruitful co-operation that had developed, which had clearly worked to the benefit of both institutions.

This co-operation found an outstanding expression in the address by Mr Frattini to the Assembly during the debate in the Assembly in June 2006. He referred to Mr Marty’s report as “a milestone in the co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe”. Mr Cem Özdemir, in his capacity as Vice-Chair of the European Parliament’s Temporary Committee on the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the transport and illegal detention of prisoners, took part in the same debate.

**ABOLITION OF THE DEATH PENALTY**

One of the Assembly’s proudest achievements is to have created a de facto death penalty free zone in the Council of Europe. It initiated the two protocols to the European Convention on Human Rights that abolish the death penalty – the first in peacetime, the second in all circumstances – and made abolition of the death penalty a condition of accession for new member states.

Whilst continuing strongly to encourage Russia to ratify the first of these Protocols, we have more recently turned our attention to the situation in Observer states – in particular, the USA and Japan – along with Belarus, whose parliament held Special Guest until it was suspended, and Kazakhstan, with whose parliament we have a special Co-operation Agreement. On the global scale, the Assembly strongly supported the Italian initiative in the United Nations to achieve a universal moratorium, which we did through a resolution adopted in June 2007.

We have also remained vigilant to any development that might threaten a reintroduction of the death penalty. For this reason, in August 2006 I reacted publicly to initiatives in Poland to reintroduce the death penalty. I wrote a strongly-worded letter to President Kaczynski, who appeared to have supported these moves, and formally requested our Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to keep a close eye on the situation.
Fortunately, the authorities then distanced themselves from this initiative, which lost momentum.

Whenever possible I have sought to lend the moral and political weight of the Assembly to international campaigns for abolition of the death penalty. I gave an opening speech at the 3rd World Congress against the Death Penalty in February 2007. More recently, I have strongly supported the establishment of a European Day against the Death Penalty, established in October 2007 by a decision of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

I have made several interventions in individual cases: I have issued numerous public statements against individual executions, involving not only the USA and Japan but also Libya (the Bulgarian nurses), Iran, the Palestinian Authorities and Iraq. I even intervened in the case of Saddam Hussein – everyone has the right to life, without exception.

**Monitoring**

The monitoring procedure of the Assembly is one of the most important tools at its disposal to ensure full respect for democracy, the rule of law and protection of human rights in Europe, especially in the countries which are still in the process of transition towards fully-fledged, functioning democracies. The monitoring reports of PACE are among the most valuable sources of information on and assessment of the respect for human rights and democracy in member states. The commendable efforts of the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States (Monitoring Committee) have produced positive results in the 20 countries it has monitored in the ten years of its existence. At the moment, 13 countries are under a monitoring procedure or engaged in a post-monitoring dialogue. The committee has also recently investigated applications to initiate a monitoring procedure in respect of Italy and the United Kingdom and has actively participated in the accession procedure concerning Montenegro.

Over the years, constant dialogue with the authorities of the countries under monitoring has enabled the committee to set roadmaps often reflected in national action plans (for instance in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine) to fulfil specific commitments entered into upon accession to the Council of Europe. Progress has been made everywhere, but there have also been setbacks due to changing circumstances or political stalemates.

In all my visits and meetings with representatives of the countries concerned, I have insisted on the importance of continuing their co-operation with the Monitoring Committee and implementing all the recommendations contained in the specific resolutions adopted by the Assembly. The shortcomings identified by the Monitoring Committee are sometimes
misconstrued as unfair finger-pointing by countries which have undergone tremendous changes, often in less than a decade. I have always made it clear that the monitoring procedure should be seen by the countries concerned as a way of assisting and accompanying them.

We should also be aware that democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights are never achieved once and for all, and that the other 33 member states of the Council of Europe also need to be reminded of the need to respect their statutory obligations as member states of this Organisation. In this respect, the Assembly has welcomed the initiative taken by the Monitoring Committee in 2006 with a view to monitoring also the record of member states not currently placed under the Assembly’s monitoring or post-monitoring procedure.

**Other Assembly activities**

The work of the Assembly is multi-faceted and tries to embrace all areas of concern for European citizens. Migration, culture, education, social issues and gender equality are all areas in which we have tried to make substantial progress, through the prism of their impact on the Assembly’s core business: democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

**Migration**

Migrants are an integral and important part of European society. Although at times migration has led to tensions in host countries, present-day Europe is composed of a mix of people from different origins and backgrounds. Integration cannot be a one-sided adaptation process: it requires dialogue and goodwill on the part both of the host society and of migrants.

While European leaders squabble over how to deal with mass arrivals of new migrants, people are drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. Any measures taken in Europe must also include concrete assistance for countries of origin so as to tackle the root causes of migration and provide greater prospects for would-be migrants in their home country. I stressed that all European countries need to share the burden of dealing with arrivals on a humanitarian front and also as part of a common European migration management strategy.
Furthermore, with 13.5 million irregular migrants living in Europe – of these a massive 8 million in the Russian Federation – and with a new record level of mass arrivals in the Mediterranean region, it is of utmost importance that we agree on a lasting solution for irregular migrants living on our continent.

I strongly encouraged the organisation of a European Day on Migration and Integration, hosted by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Assembly, in the historic City of Aachen (Germany) on 19-20 November 2007. In this context, a proposal was made to ask the Council of Europe, the European Union and their member states to organise a European Day for Integration and Intercultural Tolerance every year. Aachen and its Charlemagne Prize Foundation should be closely associated with this European Day.

The European Day would be an important contribution to the promotion of peace and co-operation in Europe, based on common values of equality, human rights and democracy.

Culture, education, youth and sport

As I explain at length in Chapter 4, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue has been one of the greatest priorities of my presidency. But I have also attached the utmost importance to involving young people as closely as possible in the European ideal. It is my firm conviction that the younger generation tends to be forward-looking, inspired and European-oriented. As a consequence, most of my official visits to member states have included dedicated meetings with students. I have also strongly promoted better academic exchanges at European level.
Here I would like to draw attention to the importance of sport. Sport is a universal language. It is one of the most natural and successful means to promote and practice integration and social cohesion. Democracy, accountability, fairness, solidarity and transparency are crucial in realising to the full the social and democratic potential of sport in general.

This is why I strongly promoted the holding of the conference “Play fair with Sport” which took place in Strasbourg on 29 September 2006, co-organised by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), in co-operation with the Russian State Duma.

** Trafficking in human beings and the fight against domestic violence **

During my presidency, in Madrid on 27 November 2006, the Council of Europe launched a pan-European campaign to combat violence against women, including domestic violence. In my speech at the conference, I focused on the way in which members of parliament could make a difference: first of all, by adopting legislation that prosecutes and punishes the perpetrators, protects the most vulnerable individuals, even in the private sphere, and reinforces the rights of victims; and by ensuring that our states respect international norms and standards. As parliamentarians, we have the capacity, and the duty, to lead public opinion, raise awareness and denounce publicly and explicitly domestic violence as something that has no place in civilised societies.

The Parliamentary Assembly decided to implement the parliamentary dimension of the campaign through its project “Parliaments united in combating domestic violence against women”. It actively involved PACE’s 47 member parliaments and three observer parliaments in this project.

At the same time, the Assembly issued two handbooks for parliamentarians, on domestic violence and on trafficking in human beings. Finally, I was also involved in the promotion and ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings. I am very pleased that it will enter into force on 1 February 2008.
Social issues

Social rights, enshrined in the revised European Social Charter, have always been at the heart of the action of the Council of Europe and of our Parliamentary Assembly. The Charter should be regarded as the basic core of social rights which Council of Europe member states should guarantee for their citizens. Parliamentarians have an essential responsibility in this respect and this is why the Assembly has launched the idea that the members of the European Committee of Social Rights be elected by the Parliamentary Assembly (Recommendation 1795 (2007) on the monitoring of commitments concerning social rights, rapporteur: Mr Claude Evin).

I have also been particularly committed to children’s rights, since they are an essential part of human rights. During a dedicated debate in January 2007 with the participation of Mrs Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF, Her Royal Highness Princess Caroline of Hanover, President of the World Association of Children’s Friends (AMADE), and Mr Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, the Assembly called for:

- greater protection of children’s rights;
- better mediation mechanisms to guarantee that children’s best interests are served;
- greater co-operation at international and national level to stop child trafficking and exploitation;
- greater accountability in childcare systems;
- better education and awareness-raising programmes.

I also wish to pay a special tribute to the work in this field of the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Maud de Boer-Buquicchio.
The need for specific action has become particularly urgent now that Europe is confronted with situations which it liked to think were to be found only in developing countries, such as child labour, child prostitutes, child pornography, street children and the like. The commendable recent work of Mrs Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold, (Switzerland, SOC) on the disappearance of newborn babies for illegal adoption in Europe deserves special attention.

**Regional co-operation, environment**

The first ever Conference of National Parliaments and Regional Assemblies entitled “Representative democracy, European affairs and active citizenship”, which took place in Strasbourg on 12 September 2007, stepped up considerably co-operation between the national parliaments and regional assemblies, the Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) and other national and European parliamentary organisations.

Climate change is increasingly a matter of great concern and a challenge which requires joint forces by all international actors. I am glad that in January 2008 the Assembly is holding a major debate on this issue, to which Mr Mikhail Gorbachev, President of Green Cross International, and Mr Al Gore, Laureate of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, have been invited.

**Budget of the Council of Europe**

The financial situation in which the Assembly and the Council of Europe’s other indispensable bodies find themselves has been a matter of serious and constant concern throughout my presidency. The foremost problem facing our organisation is its member states’ attitude towards the budget.

Of course, the Council of Europe must be run properly and responsibly, with an eye to avoiding waste. We also must concentrate on our core business so that we excel in promoting and defending our principles and values. But as was pointed out in the Assembly Resolution 1575 and Recommendation 1812 (2007), the budgetary issue has a political dimension. I am convinced that member states seriously undervalue our activities and potential. Yet, if the present vicious circle of cost-cutting and reducing under-funded activities is not broken, the quality of our work will seriously suffer. This, in return, would seriously undermine the political influence of our organisation.
Set against this attitude, it is quite absurd that the European Union – whose members now constitute a majority in the Council of Europe – saw fit to establish the Agency for Fundamental Rights.

If human rights are a real priority for member states – and not just an opportunity for political posturing – then they have to put their money where their mouths are; and most importantly, they have to put it where it will do the most good, into the Council of Europe.

Following the adoption of the above-mentioned Assembly texts on the political dimension of the budget of the Council of Europe, I have written to all chairmen of national delegations asking them to defend, through parliamentary question-time, budgetary discussions and dedicated parliamentary debate, the national contribution to the budget of the Council of Europe.

**The values of the Council of Europe and our closest neighbours**

**Belarus**

Bringing all the countries of the continent under the same roof is a great achievement of the Council of Europe, but it is not complete yet. One country is missing: Belarus. And with it, ten million Belarusians, ten million Europeans.

I would have wished that during my presidency we could have seen democratically-elected representatives of the Belarusian people sitting in the Assembly in Strasbourg, next to their European colleagues. Unfortunately, this has not been possible.

Our Assembly has followed events in Belarus since 1992, when it granted Special Guest Status to the Belarusian Parliament after the country applied for membership in the Council of Europe. Since the constitutional changes of 1996, year after year, we have observed a deterioration of the situation in the country and we have responded by adapting our strategy: we sus-
I fear that during the same period, we may not have done enough to give concrete support to the grass-root democratic processes, in particular civil society. And at the same time, the Belarusian people have been even further isolated from the rest of Europe.

On the basis of Assembly Resolution 1482 (2006) on the situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election, Mr Cyril Svoboda, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and I took the initiative to hold a conference in Prague on 22-23 February 2006. In a joint statement at the end of the conference, we encouraged Council of Europe member states to strengthen their support for the further development of democratic forces and civil society in Belarus and ending the isolation of the Belarusian people. We also made a concrete proposal to establish an Information Office/Centre of the Council of Europe in Belarus, with a view to promoting awareness among the Belarusian population at large of Council of Europe principles and values.

In Resolution 1496 (2006) on Belarus, in the aftermath of the presidential election of 19 March 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly strongly condemned the undemocratic conduct of the election as well as the wave of intimidation, violence and persecution that hit Belarusian democratic forces before, during and after the vote. I made a dedicated statement condemning actions aimed at creating a climate of intimidation by the Lukashenko regime against opposition candidates ahead of the presidential election.

In July 2006 I welcomed the change of heart on Belarus by the EU Presidency, held at the time by Finland, which had said that its policy of isolating Belarus had not worked. I called on the Finnish Presidency of the 25-nation EU and the Russian Presidency of the 46-nation Council of Europe to work together to foster that dialogue. Furthermore, I expressed my readiness to go to Belarus if it would help this country on its path to democracy.

The visit to Minsk indeed took place on 18-20 January 2007, at the invitation of Mr Vladimir Konoplev, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Mr Gennady Novitsky, Chairman of the Council of the Republic.

In meetings with Mr Konoplev and Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Martynov, I called for the release of all those imprisoned for allegedly political reasons, and offered dialogue with Belarus – but said it must be based on respect for and the implementation of Council of Europe values such as the freedom of expression, the organisation of free and fair elections and the abolition of the death penalty. I asked for concrete steps by the authorities in this direction.

Stressing to the authorities that every country needed a strong opposition to ensure the proper functioning of the political system, as well as a strong civil society, I called for greater dialogue among all the political forces in the country.

I also met with members of the opposition, including Alexander Milinkevich and Irina Kozulin, wife of imprisoned opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin, and representatives of civil society and NGOs. Unfortunately I was not able to meet Mr Kozulin, a candidate in the last
presidential elections, who was in prison for, in my opinion, political reasons. All opposition members I met welcomed my visit to the country, considering that it was a good moment for such a visit, and that it was a positive step for promoting democratic development.

At the end of the visit I stated that I could see more willingness on the part of the authorities to move closer to European structures, in particular the Council of Europe and the European Union. In this respect, I proposed several steps to promote Council of Europe values in Belarus, facilitate dialogue and intensify people-to-people contact.

To my great regret, I cannot really say that any ostensible, far-reaching steps have been made by the Belarusian authorities towards respect for the Council of Europe’s guiding principles and values. But even if we have profound differences with Belarus, I continue to believe that the only way to improve things is through dialogue.

**Middle East**

The Parliamentary Assembly regularly debates the situation in the Middle East and brings together parliamentarians from all sides in the conflict. 2007 marked the 50th anniversary of the Israeli Knesset’s observer status with the Assembly; in recent years, the Assembly has also developed formal, structured working relations with members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The Assembly has now launched an initiative to set up a Tripartite Forum between members of the Knesset, the Palestinian Legislative Council and PACE.

I made an official visit to the Middle East from 18 to 24 August 2007 with

"I also urge your political leaders to take clear, concrete steps towards opening up Belarusian society and democratising its political life.

As soon as we see signs of progress and good will, the Council of Europe will be ready to offer its support and assistance, to help to build a better, European future for all your country’s citizens.

Speech delivered before the Belarusian State University, Minsk, 19 January 2007"
the aim of encouraging opportunities presented by the current situation to achieve sustainable peace in the region and to promote inter-religious dialogue. In Jordan, I was received at a private audience with King Abdullah II and held meetings with the Prime Minister and the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Representatives. In Israel, I met with the President of the State, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Knesset, Knesset members, religious leaders, the families of abducted Israeli soldiers, Quartet diplomats and NGOs. Finally, in the Palestinian Territories, I had meetings with the President, the Prime Minister and several members of the Palestinian Authority and of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

All interlocutors emphasised their broad support for the active engagement and commitment of the Council of Europe and the European Union in the Middle East and especially (the follow-up to) the peace process. The role of the Council of Europe was considered as important in particular due to its open relations with all parties involved, ranging from political leaders and especially parliamentarians to religious leaders and civil society.

The Council of Europe was pointed out as an example of an effective instrument able to contribute to the peace process and, in the future, the consolidation of peace. Several specific initiatives were suggested. For example, the Council for the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land asked for formalised relations with the Assembly; the Chief Rabbis in Israel asked for support for their proposal to ensure formal international protection of all holy monuments and sites; the Council of Europe was asked to get involved in eliminating incitement to hatred in educational materials and the media, in both Palestine and Israel.

The meetings that I held underlined the importance attached to parliamentary diplomacy. In addition, the strong relation between the Council of Europe and NGOs was seen as bringing added value.

In the past, several leaders from the Middle East have addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This existing commitment between the region and the Council of Europe has been renewed, with invitations made to and, in principle, accepted by Jordan’s King Abdullah II, Israeli Speaker Mrs Dalia Itzig and Palestinian President Mr Mahmoud Abbas.
Building a Europe without dividing lines
A home for 800 million citizens

When the nightmare of the Second World War was over, people in Europe vowed “Never again”. They shared the vision of a Europe based on peace, stability and prosperity.

The Council of Europe was born in 1949 out of this vision, and later the European communities were set up which have become the European Union of today.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a new historical challenge has emerged – the challenge to put an end to the division of Europe.

“Building Europe without new dividing lines“, the challenge of the 21st century, has become the main task of the Council of Europe. This historic mission derives from the Council’s unique position, as the only pan-European political organisation bringing together almost all the countries of the continent on an equal footing, united around shared values and principles and bound by the same commitments and obligations.

With 27 member states of the Council of Europe being now also a member of the European Union, we must ensure that no division arises within the Council of Europe between member states with differing membership of various organisations.

Our primary objective will continue to be working towards a united, peaceful and democratic Europe. It is the Council of Europe’s role to ensure that political tensions and rivalries within our continent will not lead – again – to a growing gap between us. There must be no new dividing lines in Europe, nor a return to old East-West antagonisms. There is only one, single, Europe.
The relationship with non-EU member states

The Council of Europe has been instrumental in the unprecedented enlargement of the European Union in recent years: the criteria in the field of democracy, human rights and rule of law that potential EU members have had to comply with are very much those set up by our organisation. The same applies to present and future EU candidates. And we all have reason to be proud of what each and every country in these regions has achieved.

Political and legal reforms and the consolidation of democracy and democratic institutions have been mainly the result of an intensive dialogue and co-operation with the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.

Some countries moved ahead at a faster pace in their road to full Euro-Atlantic integration. They have become full members of the EU or NATO in addition to membership in the Council of Europe. And some others will need to deal with a number of serious challenges before they can accomplish their goal.

We cannot predict how long and extensive the process of further European integration will be. There are also European countries, such as Russia, that do not envisage becoming EU members.

Our main task therefore is to bring all these countries – both EU hopefuls and those choosing to continue along their own path – into a close, cooperative strategic partnership based on shared acceptance of our common values. The dialogue must be on an equal footing and based on mutual understanding and respect.

Our historic mission: a strategic partnership with Russia

In the second half of 2006, Russia took over the chair of the Committee of Ministers. For the first time in history Russia chaired – successfully! – a democratic European organisation.

During my presidency, I undertook a total of 10 official and working visits to Russia, where I repeatedly stressed the necessity of establishing a fully-fledged strategic partnership between Russia and Europe, ensuring that old rivalries will not be revived and that Russia will seek to strengthen our Organisation’s unique role in Europe. It was and still is my firm conviction that one of the biggest challenges and the most important tasks for Europe in the next 10 to 15 years is the integration of Russia into European structures. Therefore, we must invest in relations with Russia on every possible level: political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and others.

Russia is a part of Europe and Europe’s future is closely linked to the possibility of building a close, permanent and friendly partnership. In a word, Russia needs Europe as much as Europe needs Russia.

As President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I emphasised on numerous occasions that Russia must, of course, fulfil its Council of Europe commitments and obligations, as all member states must do, but to change a great power such as Russia will take time, understanding and patience. On account of its history and geography, Russia faces problems of a gravity and complexity that the rest of Europe can hardly imagine.

What we need is an open and constructive dialogue, between equal partners, in order to engage with and encourage positive developments through co-operation, not confrontation.
During my visits to Russia, I urged my interlocutors to do their utmost to ensure that Russia ratifies Protocol No. 6 on the abolition of the death penalty as soon as possible. I therefore welcomed the sentence of life imprisonment on the only surviving Beslan terrorist as a clear signal of Russia’s respect for a de facto moratorium on the death penalty. Nevertheless, I expressed hope that this moratorium would soon result in a de jure abolition of the death penalty in Russia.

Furthermore, I raised in my meetings with Mr Boris Gryzlov, Speaker of the State Duma, the absolute necessity to ratify Protocol No. 14 on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

On the Chechen Republic, I appreciated President Putin’s openness to any form of co-operation with the Council of Europe on this issue. We need to continue our dialogue to settle this conflict peacefully.

I further underlined the utmost importance of ensuring freedom of speech and the freedom of media, as well as free and fair elections, because they are a prerequisite for a state to qualify as a democracy. On the occasion of my visits to Russia, I used the opportunity to stress that people have the full right to demonstrate and that the Assembly condemns the use of force and detentions both of opposition leaders and ordinary citizens.

The murder of Anna Politkovskaya was a direct attack on democracy, and it must not go unpunished. She was one of Russia’s most courageous journalists. State authorities are responsible not only for the legal framework for journalism, but also for the general climate in which journalists are working. Journalists are the indispensable champions of our freedom of expression!

On several occasions I called on the Russian authorities to intensify the investigation and renewed my appeal to do everything in their power to bring the truth to light. I recommended that the Russian Parliament should follow the investigations closely.
Moreover, I have always sought to make the Assembly’s relations with civil society a cornerstone of our activities. During my visits to Russia, I raised with Russian officials the situation of non-governmental organisations and discussed their complaints about a new law on NGOs which has led to a substantial increase of the administrative burden on them. I therefore fully supported the call of NGOs on the Council of Europe for an evaluation of the implementation of the law.

**What should relations with Russia look like?**

I am afraid that at present we are going in the wrong direction, leading to more political tensions and to a growing gap between us. The current political tensions, if continued, will in turn undoubtedly produce negative consequences not only for the political but also for the business environment, especially in so called “strategic” areas, which is the case for instance with the energy industry.

I would briefly outline my vision on the ways to build on the partnership with Russia:

- **We need to build a European community of values.**

  The building block, the keystone, of our partnership must be our core and common fundamental values.

  Russia freely accepted the obligations and commitments of a Council of Europe member state when entering the Organisation. On that basis, Russia accepts discussion, assistance and even criticism coming from the Council of Europe – it is our “internal” matter, Russia being a full member of the Council of Europe.

  This element of equality is something which the European Union does not and cannot have. When the EU deals with human rights, democracy and rule of law issues in Russia, it is a sort of “foreign policy”, often resented as interference in Russian internal affairs.

  Therefore, Western European states, and the European Union in particular, should make much better use of the Council of Europe instruments and mechanisms when dealing with Russia on these issues.

- **We need to create an atmosphere of trust and co-operation, not of confrontation.**
Our first aim should be to prevent the return of “cold war” thinking. We must be frank enough to say that initiatives such as the planned US “nuclear shield” in the Czech Republic and Poland create political tensions with far-reaching and unpredictable consequences.

I am not enough of a military expert to say whether this system is necessary or not. But as a politician, I have strongly criticised the way in which this decision was taken, without serious consultation, as a “take it or leave it” decision. This kind of action gives arguments to the most hawkish elements in the Russian establishment and when the opinion of those people, with our “assistance”, prevails, we condemn Russia for increasing tensions.

Do we really want to start a new arm race and spend on arms the financial resources so badly needed for health, education and infrastructure?

Our second aim should be to conclude the agreement on a strategic partnership between Russia and the EU as soon as possible. The EU’s relations with Russia must not be dependent on incidents or conflicts involving individual states, but on a consistent policy of partnership which takes into account the long-term interests of both parties.

Thirdly, we must think positive and be tough but fair. There are certainly many shortcomings in Russia and we must not close our eyes to them. We must clearly ask Russia to respect its international commitments, in particular as democracy and human rights accepted in the framework of the Council of Europe. We do it, and I personally have done it on many occasions – and, may I say, not without results.

We have the Assembly’s monitoring reports which are the reference on the human rights situation in Russia and which are – this is extremely important – accepted by the Russian members sitting in our Assembly. This acceptance makes the Council of Europe’s appeal even stronger, because it is based on involvement, not confrontation.

While being critical, we must recognise that Russia has gone a long way in the past 20 years. It must not be overlooked that Russia has chosen a European future – something that we now take for granted.

Russia has made many painful reforms, and paid an enormous price for them in terms of the human suffering of a large part of its population, to such an extent that, in the eyes of many ordinary people, democratic freedoms are actually linked to impoverishment.

For Russia, the last twenty years are the only experience with democracy which this huge and complex country has ever had and I would say that democracy there is still in construction.

- We need to intensify people-to-people contacts, and invest in personal relations, in order also to improve mutual understanding.

We need to strengthen the human dimension of our co-operation – in particular in the fields of policy-making, culture, research, sport and education.

For this, people in Europe must be able to move more freely between East and West. This must be encouraged through direct contacts between different institutions, mainly universities.
The European Neighbourhood Policy

Throughout my presidency I have defended my strong belief that the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union should fully integrate the values and standards of the Council of Europe when dealing with its neighbouring countries, and that the EU should make better use of the expertise in our core areas of excellence. A lack of co-ordination between our institutions would not only result in duplication of efforts. Worse, it would create the risk of sending incoherent political messages to the countries concerned, and especially to those which have undertaken specific commitments as Council of Europe members.

As President of the Parliamentary Assembly, I strongly supported the strengthening of the Assembly’s relations with the European Parliament, with a view to improving the visibility and recognition of our institution in the European Neighbourhood Policy, as advocated by Assembly Recommendation 1724 (2005).

I therefore very much welcomed the European Parliament’s clear insistence on establishing practical co-operation with the Council of Europe on issues concerning its neighbourhood policy.

Ukraine

During my official and working visits to Ukraine, I expressed on behalf of the Assembly the importance of a strong and stable Ukrainian government, which needs to make further progress in improving its relations with neighbouring countries and fulfilling the country’s obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe. These would constitute a sign that the process of democratic development in Ukraine is truly irreversible.

We all know very well how this process of democratisation in Ukraine started in the autumn of 2004, when political turmoil led to the so-called “Orange revolution” and eventually enabled Mr Victor Yushchenko to become the President of Ukraine. In this connection, it was a great honour for me – and a symbolic event for the Parliamentary Assembly – that Mr Yushchenko visited the Council of Europe just two days after his inauguration in January 2005. It was not only Mr Yushchenko’s first speech to an international audience; he also underlined that his vision for Ukraine’s future was within the Council of Europe and the European community.

The Parliamentary Assembly therefore followed with particular concern the political events in Ukraine in 2007 which culminated in President Victor Yushchenko’s decree of 2 April 2007 announcing the dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament of Ukraine). In a swift visit to the country (20-22 May 2007), I met the highest Ukrainian authorities, parliamentary representatives, NGOs, religious leaders and foreign representatives. I tried to encourage the parties in the conflict to continue trying to find common
ground, including an agreement on a future election and further constitutional reforms, as recommended by the Assembly in its Resolution 1549 (2007) on the functioning of democratic institutions in Ukraine, and to use strictly legitimate, constitutional and peaceful means of solving the crisis.

I underlined that my role was not to judge who is right or wrong, but to help find a solution which meets the needs of Ukraine, a full member of the European family, and its people. I offered the assistance of the Council of Europe – and in particular of its Parliamentary Assembly – in order to reach this much-needed political solution.

I congratulate all sides that they had not allowed the conflict to result in confrontation on the streets, and had continued to uphold basic democratic freedoms such as freedom of expression and assembly.

During our second part-session in April 2007, I welcomed the Prime Minister of Ukraine, Mr Viktor Yanukovych, who addressed the Assembly and outlined the political situation in his country. I also held bilateral meetings with the Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament, Mr Oleksandr Moroz, prior to our debate under urgent procedure on the functioning of democratic institutions in Ukraine.

The Parliamentary Assembly was and remains a long-standing friend of Ukraine and a staunch supporter of its political development within the Council of Europe’s pan-European democratic family. Our monitoring mechanism provides a friendly and constructive co-operation framework. By stimulating and encouraging the process of democratic reform, we have worked together to build lasting peace, stability, prosperity and security in this country.

**Moldova**

Moldova has made significant progress towards becoming a modern European country in which our common European values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law are fully respected.
However, the problems that affect one member of our European family affect us all, on both a political and a practical level. During my trip to Moldova in July 2006, I stressed that the conflict in Transnistria is no excuse for not fulfilling the country’s obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe. I assured my interlocutors that the Council of Europe will do everything possible to help find a solution to this conflict and to support Moldova in its democratisation and institution-building.

I wish to put on record the good co-operation established with the President of Moldova, Mr Vladimir Voronin, and with the Speaker of Parliament, Mr Vladimir Lupu.

**THE WESTERN BALKANS**

The general policy debate on the situation in the Balkans, held during our October session in 2006, demonstrated the great importance this Assembly attaches to its relations with the countries of the Balkan region. Our efforts to further strengthen and enhance co-operation between the Western Balkans and the Council of Europe were honoured by our guest speakers during this debate. Mr Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of Albania, and Mr Adnan Terzić, Chairperson of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, came to Strasbourg to address the Assembly on important sub-regional issues.

The terrible conflicts that have devastated the countries of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s are often seen as a failure on the part of the rest of Europe – a failure to anticipate, a failure to react and a failure to prevent. But to me, the very terms of that analysis betray a far greater problem of those times – the suggestion that there is Europe on the one hand and the Balkans on the other.

I firmly believe that the process of integration of the countries of the Balkans into European institutions is the best protection against renewed instability and violence.

South-eastern Europe represents for Europe an important geo-strategic and geopolitical region. Its stability and security directly affects Europe’s political and security infrastructure.
The only long-term answer to the quest for stability in south-eastern Europe lies in its full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. The European perspective has become essential to democracy, stability, peace and prosperity in the region. And we, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, are determined to work together with the countries of south-eastern Europe to see this integration happen.

Whilst the countries in the region have achieved significant progress in becoming functioning democracies after a decade that wrecked the economy and wreaked political havoc upon them, there are significant challenges ahead. Ethnic divisions and ethnic tensions still run fairly high. The political situation is still fragile. Economic progress, now a reality, has been slow; this has affected not only the well-being of the population but, sometimes, the faith of the citizens of the region in European integration, by giving rise to radical and nationalist movements.

I visited the Western Balkans at the invitation of the Speakers of the Parliaments of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia in July 2006. I strongly encouraged the states concerned to continue their close co-operation with the Assembly’s monitoring procedure, whose work must never be seen as a form of negative criticism, but as a strong source of positive assistance towards fulfilling their commitment to uphold the Council of Europe’s values and principles.

Constitutional reform, reform of the judiciary, educational reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and the need to efficiently tackle the problems of refugees and internally displaced persons are some of the major issues facing the Western Balkans.

Croatia has accomplished a great deal in its efforts to fully integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures but it still needs to give special attention to the reforms necessary in a genuinely functioning democracy.

If the EU does not stick to the promises it has made about the Western Balkans’ long-term prospect of membership, Europe and the EU will lose their credibility. But if Europe should stick to its promises, your countries also need to respect their obligations – to carry out wide-ranging, profound reforms in order to transform your societies into real democracies.

Speech at the Conference on “Completing Europe’s Southern Dimension: the values that bind us”, Dubrovnik, Croatia, July 2006
During my visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, I discussed the progress achieved in building a stable and functional state. I was worried about the ethnic division within society, which was regrettably still a concern. One particularly worrying phenomenon in BiH is the situation in the sector of education, especially concerning history textbooks. I stressed that there would be no reconciliation, and efforts to promote “living together and not side by side in one country” were doomed to fail if BiH continued to promote education based on ethnic origin.

I encouraged all my interlocutors to overcome political disputes, or speeches encouraging hatred or ethnic division, and stressed the need to work together towards building an efficient state, based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In Montenegro, I encouraged parliamentarians and authorities to work closely together with the Venice Commission in the process of drafting a new constitution. A constructive and inclusive dialogue, addressing all the fundamental issues of a functioning democracy, is very important for Montenegro’s future. Additionally, I highlighted the need for all Montenegrins work together towards consolidating Montenegro as a functional and genuine democratic state. I furthermore stressed that priority must be given now to establishing harmonious relations with all neighbouring countries, especially Serbia.

On the occasion of my visit to Serbia in July 2006, I met with the Speaker of the Parliament, Mr Predrag Markovic, and the President of Serbia, Mr Boris Tadic, as well as with representatives of opposition political parties, representatives of NGOs and religious leaders. With all interlocutors, I emphasised Serbia’s obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe and Serbia’s role in promoting stability in the region. Even though Serbia demonstrated its political maturity prior to, during and after the results of the referendum in Montenegro in 2006, I stressed the importance of establishing a harmonious relationship between both countries to ensure lasting peace and prosperity.

During my meeting with President Tadic, I expressed concern about the increase in international rhetoric and the lack of results regarding co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). I appreciated his views on the need to promote European values in the region and to de-balkanize the Balkans. I stressed the Assembly’s full support on these issues and offered to help Serbia on its way to becoming a full democracy.

I made another official visit to Belgrade in May 2007, prior to Serbia’s Chairmanship, to participate in the Standing Committee of the Assembly and to prepare the forthcoming six-month chairmanship. This meeting took place in a very dynamic period in Serbian political life, with a government which had just been formed, and a Speaker of Parliament who was elected during my stay in Belgrade. As a symbolic move, illustrating Serbia’s European orientation, both the Foreign Minister and the Speaker made their first public appearances in front of the Standing Committee. Serbia’s commitment to our common values, and its ability to play a full and constructive role in the international community, was demonstrated through the priorities and activities of its Chairmanship in 2007.
However, the negotiation on the future status of Kosovo is another difficult test ahead. Additionally, I repeated my call for the fugitives from justice, Karadzic and Mladic, to be brought to trial immediately. It is a source of great disappointment to us all that they remained at large even whilst Serbia held the chairmanship of our Committee of Ministers.

During my official visit to Albania in October 2005, I emphasised the need for the government, political parties and the judiciary to take strong action to fight corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings. In my meetings with all interlocutors, I stressed the importance of fulfilling and honouring the commitments and obligations made to the Council of Europe. We therefore discussed the possibilities for closer co-operation between Albania and the Parliamentary Assembly to improve the situation of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We, in the Council of Europe, will continue to provide the states of the Western Balkans with the pan-European platform for building a Europe without dividing lines, to assist their transformation into genuine democracies and to fully support their integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

**The Caucasus**

The South Caucasus region is of the greatest importance for the political stability of our continent, as shown by our numerous debates on these countries within the Parliamentary Assembly.

During my mandate, I carried out two official journeys to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In all three countries, I met the highest state representatives, both at executive and parliamentary levels, the leaders of different political forces, including the opposition, representatives of the civil society and the media, religious leaders and the Ambassadors of Council of Europe member states.

In my meetings and speeches, I stressed that the utmost priority must be given to improving relations among the countries of the region as a way to achieve the necessary reconciliation and to build a new future for younger generations. I also called on the authorities to seriously address our concerns over the freedom to hold demonstrations, freedom of the media, the unrestricted functioning of political parties and impartial justice. Furthermore, I spelled out the measures necessary to comply with the Council of Europe's standards, and to establish a Europe based on our core values, without dividing lines.

My main objective during my second visit in July 2007 was to see how we can do more to solve the frozen conflicts in the countries concerned. Only this will enable the peaceful development of the region, which is in the interest of all its peoples.

In Armenia, I called on the authorities to use the forthcoming presidential elections in 2008 to consolidate the democratic progress achieved during the recent parliamentary elections and offered the Assembly’s expertise and instruments to contribute to this process. I also declared that
open borders are a pre-condition for prosperity and that we cannot accept closed borders between Council of Europe member states, as it is the case now between Armenia’s and its neighbours Azerbaijan and Turkey.

In Georgia I stressed that solving frozen conflicts is crucial for the future development of the South Caucasus region, but that this solution must be achieved uniquely through peaceful means. Underlining the Assembly’s position that any solution to the conflicts in Georgia must respect the principle of territorial integrity, I therefore called on all parties to engage in a serious political dialogue in order to achieve progress and to stop all military confrontations and provocations.

In Azerbaijan, I underlined that it is of the utmost importance that the 2008 presidential elections take place in accordance with Council of Europe standards and mark a striking difference to the 2005 parliamentary elections. In this connection, I urged the authorities to intensify co-operation with the Council of Europe in order to improve Azerbaijan’s election legislation.

In Resolution 1416 (2005), the Assembly stated that “considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces”. During my visit to the region, I came to the conclusion that, regrettably, this situation had not changed since my last visit in 2005 and that the atmosphere between the two countries had deteriorated. I therefore urged political leaders on both sides to show the determination to give a new political impetus to the negotiations. In any case, I stressed that Armenia and Azerbaijan must respect their commitment, made when they joined the Council of Europe, to use only peaceful means to settle the conflict.
Cyprus

There will be no lasting resolution of the situation in Cyprus without serious and sustained dialogue between the two communities, at every possible level. The Assembly has already encouraged working contacts, and two representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community participate in our activities. For my part, I have tried to promote dialogue and reconciliation by using the human dimension and parliamentary diplomacy, as well as to encourage steps, whether large or small, that could contribute to bringing the two communities together.

I conducted an official visit to the Republic of Cyprus between 19 and 22 February 2007. I held a series of bilateral meetings with the highest Cypriot authorities and the Chief of the UN Mission and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, and members of the diplomatic community in Cyprus. I also met the Leader of the Turkish Cypriot community Mr Talat.

I was very pleased that all the “bicommmunal” meetings I had suggested could take place: representatives of civil society; the leaders of political parties; the mayors of the southern and northern parts of Nicosia; and the two communities’ religious leaders, Archbishop Chrysostomos II and the Director of Religious Affairs Mr Ahmet Yonluer. This latter meeting was particularly rewarding: not only was this the first time the respective participants had met; it was the first meeting between the two religious leaders since 1974. They issued a forward-looking joint statement containing proposals for concrete follow-up on issues such as ensuring respect for, and enabling the use of, places of worship.

Also, Mr Özdíl Nami, one of the two elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community in the Assembly, participated in the working lunch hosted by the Cypriot delegation headed by Mr Andros Kyprianou.
During my meetings, I addressed six main themes:

- the importance of implementing the 8 July agreement;
- the need for an immediate opening of the Ledra Street crossing of the Green Line;
- the need for Cypriot politicians to support a free and active civil society: civil society representatives had complained to me that, following the referendum on the Annan plan, many had been subject to unjustified criticism and attacks;
- how to promote the progressive integration of universities in the northern part of Cyprus into the Bologna process, on the basis that education and international contacts would help the process of understanding and reconciliation;
- the need for respect for cultural heritage, including places of worship, in both parts of the island;
- ways to improve sporting, youth and higher educational contacts between the two communities.

I continually emphasised the need to identify specific, practical issues of common interest on which the two communities could co-operate. I urged the two communities’ leaders to show more flexibility: neither the fact of having voted “yes” in the referendum on the Annan plan, nor membership of the European Union, would allow either side to avoid the need to make concessions. The press release issued at the conclusion of the visit encapsulated this message by calling on both sides to turn the buffer zone from a symbol of division into a symbol of co-operation.

Despite the goodwill showed by all my interlocutors, progress on all these issues has been rather insignificant. This is one more reason, though, to pursue the dialogue and encourage it both at political and people-to-people level. Following my visit, therefore, I wrote several letters to those I had met. I also organised a meeting during the April 2007 part-session which brought together the Cypriot delegation and the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community, attended also by the delegations of Greece and Turkey. In the last months of my presidency, I gave my political backing to a project for the creation of a Council of Europe ‘Academy of Political Studies’ in Cyprus, funded by the European Commission. The concept is to offer an informal platform for dialogue between young leaders from both communities in Cyprus, as a contribution to confidence-building and better understanding.

**Turkey: the European perspective**

Turkey, through its geographical position, history and modern democratic development, is a European country. Its European vocation was already demonstrated when, in 1949, it became one of the earliest member states of the Council of Europe.

For geopolitical reasons and also from the point of view of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, Turkey is of great importance to Europe. It is a bridge and an example to neighbouring countries and regions. This potential to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue has already been manifest in the important Alliance of Civilisations initiative, which the Assembly fully supports.
Many years ago, Turkey was promised membership of the European Union if it satisfied certain conditions. In recent years, Turkey has made enormous progress in this direction; so much so that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was able to end the monitoring of Turkey’s fulfilment of its obligations and commitments.

At the same time – perhaps even as a result, as the prospect of accession has become more real – part of opinion in the European Union has seemed to shift against Turkish membership. Of course, Turkey still has to continue the reform process, especially on issues such as freedom of expression and independence of the judiciary. But, despite high emotions in recent years, the tensions have never become a crisis. Instead, difficult situations have been resolved through peaceful, democratic and constitutional means, with full respect for the right to peaceful demonstration and without any intervention by the military or outside forces.

On the foreign policy front, Turkey has also faced an increasingly complicated situation with the war in Iraq. Turkey has the potential to be a partner of enormous economic and geopolitically strategic importance.

We must also consider the consequences of breaking our promises: for the future of us all, we must not reject Turkey’s European vocation or alienate her people.

It was deeply symbolic that the first major speech outside Turkey of the newly-elected Turkish President Abdullah Gül – a former Assembly member – was delivered to this Assembly. Already back in 2003, as Prime Minister, he had spoken with conviction about his personal and his country’s experience and the lessons learnt from his work with the Council of Europe.

I made official visits to Turkey in November 2005 and again in October 2006. As President of the Parliamentary Assembly, I made it my personal commitment to stress the importance of Turkey for the Council of Europe and its vital role in European and world affairs in general. In both cases, I

Turkey highlights the importance of the Council of Europe as a unique multi-cultural and multi-religious forum, which is the real richness of our Organisation.

Speech before the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Ankara, 9 November 2005
stressed the importance that the Assembly attaches to the major political and legislative reforms accomplished by Turkey, and to the need for further progress on the twelve points identified by the Assembly when it closed the monitoring procedure.

With my interlocutors, I discussed current affairs related to Turkey’s relations with the Council of Europe and the European Union; the accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey; the current situation in the relations between Turkey and Cyprus; Turkey’s role in developing intercultural and inter-religious dialogue; its role as a stabilising factor in relevant geopolitical issues. During both visits, I met with the highest authorities as well as with representatives of NGOs, religious leaders, trade and industry figures and academics.

**No dividing lines, no visa lines: the European Union’s visa policy**

As the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of a truly pan-European organisation, I have paid particular attention to the European Union’s visa policy. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall the Council of Europe has been working to bring the people of Europe together politically, socially, economically and culturally. Practically, the achievement of this aim goes along with reducing the need for visas.

It is my firm belief that our goal should be for all European citizens to have the possibility of travelling within Europe without visa restrictions. Therefore, I called for a visa-free European continent as a long-term goal of any European visa policy.

During my presidency, I urged the European Union to facilitate the acquisition of visas by non-EU citizens, in order to encourage relations among those Europeans whose countries are not members of the European Union. In particular, I highlighted the importance of simplifying visa procedures for students and academics; to intensify academic exchanges among all European states and to increase mutual understanding and mutual co-operation.

The prospective new Community Code on Visas of the European Union tries to balance, on the one hand, states’ need to tackle illegal migration and enforce legitimate border controls and, on the other hand, the situation of individuals, who need to travel for a range of reasons and with a minimum of bureaucratic hurdles.

However, on the occasion of a public hearing co-organised by the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Assembly’s Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population in February 2007, I stressed the importance of making the Community Code on Visas consistent, clear and transparent.

Visa lines should not become a cause for national and international tensions and European citizens should not face undue hardship and difficulties in seeking to cross these visa lines.

One of the Council of Europe’s main aims is to ensure a Europe without dividing lines. It is the Assembly’s position that visas for non-EU citizens in Europe should be made available quickly, efficiently and conveniently – in keeping with human dignity!
For years now, there has been talk of a clash of civilisations between a “Christian west” and a “Muslim east”. Within Europe, religious extremists have been responsible for terrorist attacks in France, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom and Turkey; as they have been elsewhere in the world, most frequently the Middle East.

The world is globalising and yet we live in ignorance of one another: growing contacts between different peoples are leading to conflict and opportunities for fruitful exchange are being lost. This is where dialogue, producing mutual trust and understanding based on an appreciation of our shared humanity and common values, must play its part.

But where has this dialogue been in practice? Hard military power and strict security controls have played an overwhelming role in responding to perceived terrorist threats, yet with distinctly mixed results and often at a disastrous cost in terms of both lives and liberties.

In response to these concerns, I determined to make the question of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue one of the main priorities of my presidency of the Parliamentary Assembly.

The Parliamentary Assembly does not have hard, military power, or even leverage through trade and economic relations. We do, however, have exceptional potential for promoting and facilitating intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. With 636 elected representatives coming from the national parliaments of our 47 member states, we are a genuinely pan-European democratic body reflecting all the continent’s nationalities, cultures and religions. In addition, our mandatory focus on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and our central concern to ensure respect for human life and human dignity, give us credibility and moral authority.

By building on the strength of our soft power, we have been able to play a pioneering role in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. In this connection, I have invited prominent statesmen and world religious leaders to address the Assembly and have brought together national religious leaders in places where religious tensions have been highest, including the Balkans, Cyprus and the Middle East, as well as speaking at high-level international conferences. During my presidency, the Assembly has been highly active at both committee and plenary level, organising many important colloquies, hearings, seminars and debates and adopting numerous resolutions and recommendations.
Meetings with World Religious Leaders

In November 2005, I met Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul. I stressed the need to strictly respect religious freedom, calling for a complete separation between the State and religion and underlining that freedom of religion and its unrestricted practice must be guaranteed by the state and all obstacles to the full enjoyment of this essential right must be lifted. It is necessary to strictly respect the rights of religious minorities, including their property rights, and the rights of minorities in general.

We also discussed the proposals on inter-religious and intercultural dialogue that I had made in my address to the Grand National Assembly earlier in my visit, including to fully develop the Council of Europe as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. This idea received wide support during my other meetings. We also talked about the need to involve the Council of Europe in the UN initiative on the “Alliance of Civilisations,” with the suggestion that one of the next meetings in this framework could take place in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. We spoke of the need to intensify the Council of Europe’s contribution to the integration of migrant communities living in Western Europe, by developing mutual understanding and improving both the image of migrants and their countries of origin. Finally, we discussed the danger of creating a link between religion and social problems caused by exclusion, unemployment and lack of education. I invited the Patriarch to address the Parliamentary Assembly, which he accepted. We continued our discussions on the occasion of his visit to the Assembly.

At a private audience in Rome with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in April 2006, I discussed relations between different religions, stressing the role of the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. I also emphasised the role of the Council of Europe as a community of values with, at its core, human dignity. We then discussed the importance of ethical values and the promotion of values by the Church, including the extraordinary role of the late Pope John Paul II and his mission of peace. I invited the Pope to address the Parliamentary Assembly. On this occasion, I also met Cardinal Sodano, with whom I discussed relations between the Holy See and the Council of Europe, in particular the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as relations with civil society.
I met Patriarch Alexy II in Moscow in January 2007. During this meeting, I stressed the importance of the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and a tribune for the dignitaries of different religions to promote peace, mutual understanding and respect for human dignity. I also developed the proposal, which I had made at several international fora, concerning the need to offer to churches and confessional organisations an official status with the Council of Europe. The Patriarch accepted my invitation to address the Assembly; we continued our discussions on the occasion of his visit.

INVITATIONS TO WORLD RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADERS TO ADDRESS THE ASSEMBLY

In October 2005, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, addressed the Assembly. In his speech, he argued that “grievances would have disappeared long ago had we been able to create an accommodation between our two civilisations, based on common heritage, and had we worked more closely together”. He continued: “We have solid reasons to work together, to deal with one another, and to flourish together [namely] the geographical proximity of Islam and the West... [and] common values [in particular] justice and equality among all beings... [and] a common spiritual reference. That is a strong basis on which we can build a better future. For that, we need an open and critical dialogue to take place between us that should include intellectuals and representatives of civil society.” Some of the “gigantic steps” necessary to achieve this, he concluded, “can be jointly undertaken through structured co-operation between the Council of Europe and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference”.

One year later, we welcomed Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey, who spoke in particular about the Alliance of Civilisations initiative co-sponsored by Turkey and Spain in the United Nations. In his address, he described how the Alliance of Civilisations could achieve the goal of communication and
shared understandings between host and migrant communities in multi-cultural societies, thereby creating a peaceful world for future generations. In order to avoid a “clash of civilisations”, it was necessary to make respect for differences between people the starting point, including by disregarding some of the values of the past and starting afresh in protecting the freedoms of others and by not evoking the syndrome of fear or hatred of the “other”. The Alliance of Civilisations could assist in achieving the necessary global co-operation, a process with which he hoped the Council of Europe would assist.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and New Rome spoke profoundly to the Assembly in January 2007 of the role of churches in contributing to the development of human rights and the importance of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue to protecting and promoting human rights. The Patriarch recalled that “for nearly six centuries, the Ecumenical Patriarch has lived with Muslims and discussed various matters in order to achieve various goals … a dialogue based on living side by side.” He argued that “the moral force of respect for the human person … is so great that it will overcome and overrule the long-lasting spiritual infirmities that allow those in power to ignore or, even worse, legally violate human rights.” Addressing the risk of violence and extremism, he noted that “that which is accomplished fluently through inter-religious dialogues is the cultivation of a spirit of tolerance, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence of the faithful of the various religions, free from fanaticism and phobias”.

Most recently, during our autumn 2007 part-session, Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia lectured the Assembly on the connection between human rights and
moral duty. “From the very beginning, human rights developed in the context of Christian morality, forming with it a kind of tandem. Yet today there occurs a break between human rights and morality, and this break threatens European civilisation. We can see it in a new generation of rights that contradict morality, and in how human rights are used to justify immoral behaviour … [I]n the public sphere, both state and society should encourage and support moral principles acceptable for the majority of citizens … those that are linked with the spiritual and cultural tradition of the European nations…. Many societal problems have no solution unless the human person, state power and the nation as a whole are subject to moral evaluation,” for example in the alleviation of poverty and ensuring social justice. Similarly, “science and technology cannot be estranged from the moral evaluation of their goals and fruits”. Finally, he concluded that “the Council of Europe, which has potential and experience as a place of dialogue about European values, may become a good forum for … a serious dialogue between the cultures, in which representatives of both traditional religions and the secular tradition should be most actively involved.”

MEETINGS WITH NATIONAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS DURING OFFICIAL VISITS

On my official visits, I have held meetings with national religious leaders in each country, often bringing together the leaders of the various main religions.

During my official visit to Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in August 2005, I met with His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; with His Holiness and Beatitude Patriarch Ilia II of All-Georgia; and with Sheikh ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade, Head of the Board of Caucasian Muslims, and leaders of the Jewish and Orthodox religious communities in Azerbaijan. In these meetings, I noted with great satisfaction the active and positive role they had played together in the reconciliation process. There would be no sustainable development or prosperity and no future for the region's children without a peaceful settlement; all those involved had a strong interest in peace.

In October 2005, I met Mr Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain. We investigated ways in which the Parliamentary Assembly could co-operate with religious and civil society organisations to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and to fight against all forms of extremism, notably in the context of the Assembly’s report on “European Muslim communities confronted with extremism”.

Meeting with religious leaders
Azerbaijan, August 2005
© APA
I met Mr Erkan Mumcu, President of Religious Affairs, Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva and Mr Halit Eren, Director General of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference during my visit to Turkey in November 2005. I mentioned the vital need for an open dialogue between religions and civilisations, stressing the role Turkey can play as a bridge to the Muslim world. In addition, I emphasised the need for strict respect of religious freedom through secularity: “religion in every country should be free of state influence, just as the state should be free of religious influence,” I stressed.

Later that month, I met His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

I also visited the Balkans – an area that has suffered acutely through conflicts at least partly motivated by religious differences – in July 2006. During my stay in Serbia, I met representatives of the religious communities: Irinej Dobrijevic from the Serbian Orthodox Church, Secretary General of the Holy Synod of Bishops; Archpriest-stavrophor Savo Jovic, Archbishop of Belgrade; Stanislav Hocevar from the Roman Catholic Church; and the Chief Imam of Belgrade, Muhamed Jusufspahic from the Islamic Community in Serbia. I underlined the role of the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. I stressed the important role played by religious leaders in the process of peace and stability and encouraged them to join efforts and contribute to ethnic reconciliation in Serbia and in the region. The religious leaders underlined the need for more exchange and greater co-operation between the different religious communities and between the East and West in order to better understand each other’s cultures and beliefs.

Later that month, I also visited Romania, Moldova and Odessa in Ukraine. In Romania, I visited several historic monasteries, including that of Sucevita, where I was received by Archbishop Pimen Zainea of Suceava and Radauti, and the historic city of Iaşi, where I met the Roman Catholic Bishop, Petru Ghergel. During these meetings, we discussed the role of the Parliamentary Assembly in issues relating to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the preservation of cultural patrimony. In Moldova, I met representatives of the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, the Roman Catholic Church, the Union of Evangelist-Baptist Churches, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the Union of Evangelical Churches (Pentecostal Church), with whom I discussed intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the role of religious organisations in promoting common values and reconciliation at both national and European levels, including through the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.
Finally, I met Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Ismail, with whom I discussed intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the preservation of cultural patrimony and the contribution of religious organisations to the work of the Council of Europe.

In February 2007, I visited Cyprus, another member state that has suffered conflict with a religious dimension. As part of my strategy of organising as many bi-communal meetings as possible, I brought together the Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus, Chrysostomos II, and Mr Ahmet Yonluer, Turkish Cypriot Director of Religious Affairs, for the first meeting between holders of their respective offices since 1974. We discussed ways that they could contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of trust and tolerance, to set an example to the people and politicians of Cyprus. The two leaders agreed they would meet again soon. They agreed to take practical steps to promote respect for places of worship in all parts of the island, including efforts to ensure their restoration. As a first step, they agreed to work towards the goal of enabling worship at the Hala Sultan Tekke Mosque in Larnaca and the Apostolos Andreas Monastery in the Karpas Peninsula. They hoped this would mark the beginning of a long relationship of mutual trust, which would contribute to a peaceful solution to the Cyprus problem. I emphasised that intercultural and inter-religious dialogue was a priority of my Presidency, and stressed that this historic first meeting had been an excellent example.

I made a working visit to the Vatican on 2 April 2007, during which I met Cardinal State Secretary Bertone. I detailed my proposal to grant Churches official status with the Council of Europe and pointed out that the Council of Europe’s legal and political action should be strengthened through such co-operation. From this perspective, I stressed in particular the role of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as the only way of ensuring long-term peace and stability in Europe and the rest of the world; the personal contribution of religious leaders for the promotion of tolerance, respect and solidarity and the role of Churches and other religious organisations as active components of civil society, and responsible partners in our democratic societies; the potential of the Council of Europe as the best forum for discussion of the role of religion in society; and the importance for Churches to have a tribune to express their opinion on value questions in a value community such as the Council of Europe. In this context, I reiterated my invitation to Pope Benedict XVI to address the Assembly. (Along with members of the Assembly’s Bureau, I again met Cardinal Bertone on the occasion of the Bureau meeting in Rome in September 2007.) This followed a meeting with Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe in late March in Naples, where I addressed the annual youth gathering that brought together some 20,000 participants.

During my official visit to Ukraine from 20 to 22 May 2007, I met leaders of the Orthodox Church, Greco-Catholic Church and Roman-Catholic Church, the Rabbi of Kiev and the Mufti of Ukraine, as well as the Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom.
On 1 June, at the International Parliamentary Conference on Pan-European Co-operation on Intercultural and Inter-religious Dialogue in Saint Petersburg, Russia, and again on 6 September 2007, at the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania, I met Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Relations. We discussed intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, in particular the role of the Parliamentary Assembly as a natural and privileged forum; relations with Russia; the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in promoting value-based social policy; and the forthcoming address by Patriarch Alexy II to the Parliamentary Assembly.

I visited the South Caucasus in July 2007. During this visit, I met His Holiness Gareguin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, and representatives of the main religious confessions in Azerbaijan.

During my visit to the Middle East, in August 2007, I held meetings with the Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, which brought together leaders of the Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and Lutheran religious communities, and with the Chief Rabbis. I also had a separate bilateral meeting with Sheikh Tayseer Tamimi, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Sharia Court in Palestine and a member of the Council of the Religious Institutions, who had been denied entry into Jerusalem until I intervened personally with the Vice Prime-Minister.

I strongly encouraged the work of the Council as a pioneering body promoting dialogue and mutual understanding as an essential element of the peace process, with the potential to overcome long-standing obstacles and generate new momentum. In turn, members of the Council expressed strong enthusiasm for closer collaboration with the Parliamentary Assembly, on the basis of our shared commitment to common values.

I fully agreed with the Chief Rabbis on the necessity to protect and respect religious sites in the Holy Land (and around the world), and to intensify the fight against anti-Semitism and the glorification of Nazism. The Chief Rabbis also underlined the importance of excluding the teaching of hatred in schools and noted that these issues were part of the core activities of the Council of Europe. Following these meetings, I visited the Yad Vashem holocaust memorial, where I laid a wreath during a ceremony in the Remembrance Hall.
At the 3rd European Ecumenical Conference, held in Sibiu, Romania in September 2007, I met leading officials of the organising bodies, the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences, as well as the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union. We discussed issues arising during the conference, in particular intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for this dialogue, and the potential advantages of giving an official status with the Council of Europe to churches and confessional organisations.

Later that month I visited the Baltic states, where I met His Holiness Metropolitan Alexander of Riga and all Latvia and Msgr Audrys Juozas Bačkis, Archbishop of Vilnius.

**SPEECHES AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES**

The International Conference on the Dialogue of Cultures and Inter-faith Co-operation, organised by the Russian Federation in conjunction with the Council of Europe in Nizhny Novgorod in September 2006, brought together some 300 government representatives, experts and leading figures from religious communities all across Europe. In my address, I recalled that the Parliamentary Assembly was an ideal and natural forum for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, as it brought together national parliamentarians from 46 member states representing the wide political, social and geographical, as well as cultural and religious, diversity of Europe. In this connection, I called for churches and other confessional organisations to receive an official status with the Council of Europe. There was absolutely no reason why they should not have a status similar to that granted to non-governmental organisations, taking into account their specificities, I pointed out.

I recalled that the European Union Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe had recognised the important role of Churches and religious organisations in contributing to the process of European integration. I expressed by conviction that the Council of Europe must reinforce its political and legal action by co-operating with confessional organisations. Through their moral and ethical commitment and the values they upheld, they were active players in civil society and valid partners in our democratic societies.

We must work together for peace, social justice and long-term stability, thus severing the root causes of terrorism, I stressed. As regards concrete fields of co-operation, I outlined the following areas: respect for fundamental human values, family values, children’s rights, social cohesion, fighting social segregation between religious, ethnic and racial groups, encouraging integration and combating HIV-AIDS. In particular, I stressed the need to enhance human dignity by fighting poverty and exclusion.
At the 2nd Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in Astana, Kazakhstan, in September 2006, attended by representatives of the Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Shinto, Taoist and Hindu faiths, I made the first speech in the closing session. In my speech, I urged religious leaders and democratic politicians to unite around our common values in order to provide leadership in the fight against extremism and terrorism, recalling that these values were also the basis of the Council of Europe’s commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Addressing the 10th Dialogue with the Orthodox Church, organised by the European People’s Party and European Democrat Group of the European Parliament in Bratislava, Slovakia, in November 2006, I reiterated my call for churches and other religious institutions to be given an official status with the Council of Europe.

In June 2007, I spoke at the Inter-parliamentary Conference on Pan-European Co-operation on Intercultural and Inter-religious Dialogue held in Saint Petersburg, Russia. In my speech, I argued that neither Europe nor the wider world could afford to enter into a clash of civilisations. I argued that inter-religious and intercultural dialogue was one of the most important issues of our times, urging politicians to pay the highest political priority to this matter. I also stressed the need to work together with religions to defend our shared values based on the profound respect for human life and human dignity, and reiterated once again my proposal to give an official status to churches within the Council of Europe. Churches and other confessional organisations, through their moral and ethical commitment and values, were active players in civil society and valid democratic partners, I concluded.

In June 2007, I addressed the joint Catholic-Orthodox International Conference on “Christianity, Culture and Moral Values” in Moscow, Russia. Although the principle of a strict separation of Church and state should be respected, the ethical values that Churches represent should be reflected in the political life of our societies, I said. I pointed out that the values of the Council of Europe – including tolerance and mutual respect – reflected the values of the main monotheistic religions, which have marked European spiritual identity.

Addressing more than two thousand delegates at the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu (Romania) in September 2007, I called for a binding international treaty to protect religious heritage – Churches, mosques, synagogues and other sites of spiritual significance – in times of both war and peace, noting that “the wanton destruction of religious sites causes deep emotional wounds, sharpening hatred, fuelling conflict and obstructing the search for peace.” Underlining the importance of the European Ecumenical Assembly, which brought together Christian leaders from across Europe, I stressed the “vital, vibrant role” of religion and religious organisations in society: “Through their profound respect for individual human dignity, they are indispensable to advancing peace and justice in the world. I believe that politicians must recognise this and strengthen the role of Churches and religious organisations in society.” I went on to recall the importance of the Council of Europe’s “soft power”, including PACE’s parliamentary diplomacy and the occasion for dialogue provided by its various monitoring procedures.
ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE MEDIA

The March 2007 issue of Europe infos, published jointly by the Catholic European Study and Information Centre (OCIPE) and the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Community (COMICE), contained my article entitled “Arguments for an official status for Churches within the Council of Europe”.

ISSUES ADDRESSED BY THE ASSEMBLY DURING MY PRESIDENCY

In Recommendation 1720 (2005) on education and religion, the Assembly, noting that “democracy and religion should not be incompatible [but] should be valid partners in efforts for the common good”, observed that “education is essential for combating ignorance, stereotypes and misunderstandings of religions”, this in turn being “essential to the exercise of democratic citizenship”. Accordingly, governments were encouraged to “do more to guarantee freedom of conscience and of religious expression, to foster education on religions, to encourage dialogue with and between religions and to promote cultural and social expressions of religions”.

At the same time, the Assembly has not been afraid to speak out against abuses of individual rights committed in the name of religion, for example in Resolution 1464 (2005) on women and religion in Europe, which called on member states to “fully protect all women living in their country against all violations of their rights based on or attributed to religion” in areas such as so-called “honour crimes”, forced marriage, genital mutilation, family law and dress codes.

The Assembly’s ability to balance competing interests was well expressed in Resolution 1510 (2006) on freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs: on the one hand, “there cannot be a democratic society without the fundamental right to freedom of expression” but on the other, “freedom of thought, conscience and religion constitutes a necessary requirement for a democratic society”. The Assembly concluded that although “a wider margin of appreciation is generally available [to national authorities] when regulating freedom of expression in relation to matters liable to cause offence to intimate personal moral convictions or religion,” nonetheless “hate speech against any religious group [is] incompatible with the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the
Revisiting the issue in Recommendation 1805 (2007) on blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion, the Assembly underlined “the importance of respect for, and understanding of, cultural and religious diversity in Europe ... and recognise[d] the need for ongoing dialogue. Respect and understanding can help avoid friction within society and between individuals.” Whilst “blasphemy, as an insult to religion, should not be deemed a criminal offence” and “in a democratic society, religious groups must tolerate ... critical public statements and debate about their activities, teachings and beliefs,” at the same time “national law should ... penalise expressions about religious matters which intentionally and severely disturb public order and call for public violence.”

In the same enlarged, high-profile debate, the Assembly also adopted Recommendation 1804 (2007) on state, religion, secularity and human rights, which again noted that “[o]rganised religions as such are part and parcel of society and must therefore be considered as institutions set up by, and involving, citizens who have the right to freedom of religion, but also as organisations that are part of civil society, with all its potential for providing guidance on ethical and civic issues, which have a role to play in the national community, be it religious or secular.” Noting that “religion has, in recent years, again become a central issue of debate in our societies,” the Assembly “recognise[d] the importance of intercultural dialogue and its religious dimension” and encouraged governments to “take account of the special capacity of religious communities to foster peace, co-operation, tolerance, solidarity, intercultural dialogue and the dissemi-

nation of the values upheld by the Council of Europe.”

Conclusions

It is not for politicians to interfere in the internal workings of Churches and religious organisations, just as it is not for religion to interfere in politics. But the question of relations between the different religions is a public issue of the highest political importance and one that politicians cannot afford to ignore or neglect. We, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, are a value community and we should co-operate with all institutions and organisations that defend values. I am therefore proud that during my Presidency the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has played a leading role in promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.
Expanding the role of the Assembly as a forum for dialogue

During the last three years in which I presided over the Parliamentary Assembly, one of my top priorities was to expand the role of the Assembly as a forum for dialogue.

This involved, in the first place, strengthening the relations with our own national delegations, as well as those representing parliaments enjoying observer status and the parliaments of non-member states.

It is also my strong belief that if the Council of Europe is to remain relevant to the outside world, it must start by improving its own internal communication. As usual, the Assembly took the lead in this respect, especially through its Recommendation 1763 (2006) on the institutional balance at the Council of Europe. Throughout my mandate, I attached great importance to strengthening relations with our institutional partners within the organisation, starting with the Committee of Ministers, the European Court of Human Rights, the Congress and the Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as its various specialised bodies, all of which provide invaluable expertise in the areas of the organisation’s core business.

The Parliamentary Assembly represents the best pan-European forum for exchange of ideas and for debate on the most important issues and challenges that our societies are facing. Thus I tried to make the Assembly a tribune from which some of the most important European political, cultural and religious leaders, heads of international organisations and of most influential NGOs could address European citizens.

Last but not least, the role of the Assembly as a forum for dialogue finds a remarkable expression through its capacity to develop parliamentary diplomacy.
My Presidency 2005-2007: realities and dreams
Ivo Sanader,
Prime Minister of Croatia and René van der Linden
October 2006

Sali Berisha,
Prime Minister of Albania, addressing the Assembly
October 2006

Kostantinos A. Karamanlis,
Prime Minister of Greece and René van der Linden
January 2007

Alfred Gusenbauer
Federal Chancellor of Austria and René van der Linden
June 2007

Vojislav Kostunica,
Prime Minister of Serbia and René van der Linden
October 2007

Adnan Terzic,
Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and René van der Linden
October 2006

Guy Verhofstadt,
Prime Minister of Belgium addressing the Assembly
January 2007

Viktor Yanoukovych,
Prime Minister of Ukraine addressing the Assembly
April 2007

Filip Vujanovic,
President of Montenegro addressing the Assembly
October 2007

Abdullah Gül,
President of Turkey signing the guest book in the office of the Parliamentary Assembly President
October 2007
Assembly guests

Upon my initiative, that of the other members of the Presidential Committee and proposals coming from the Bureau and the committees of the Assembly, some 83 personalities visited and contributed to the debates of the Parliamentary Assembly during my presidency between 2005 and 2007.

I had the honour of welcoming a great number of heads of state and heads of government to our chamber; we listened to their visions for the future of Europe and their ideas of the Council of Europe’s prospective role in the international institutional landscape. The debates following their addresses were always stimulating and demonstrated our aspiration to discuss issues openly.

The contributions of our honourable guests provides the much-needed link between politics initiated and carried out by an international pan-European organisation such as the Council of Europe and its Assembly, and politics at national level. This stirs into motion a process that goes from member states towards Strasbourg and vice-versa – a process which is contributing to bring Europe and its policies closer to European citizens and their needs.

I tried to ensure the presence in Strasbourg of political leaders at crucial moments in the development of their respective countries. The significance of such visits was to provide a forum for dialogue and debate and, at the same time, to offer a helping hand, to show that every member state is part of a large family which would always stay united in the defence of our common values and principles.

Amongst the best examples in this respect are the visits of Mr Viktor Yushchenko, in January 2005, two days after his inauguration as President of Ukraine following the Orange Revolution, as well as that of Mr Viktor Yanukovych, Prime Minister of Ukraine in April 2007, at a time of political crisis in his country. I explicitly stated while welcoming Mr Yanukovych that the Assembly was not there to judge who was right and who was wrong or to take sides; its only objective was to contribute to finding a political solution to the ongoing crisis, in line with the Council of Europe’s values and principles.

In October 2007, I welcomed Mr Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey and a former member of the Parliamentary Assembly, for his first major speech outside Turkey following his election. He stated how much his country had benefited from the work of the Council of Europe, its standards and mechanisms and how his experience as a member of the Assembly had contributed to his political philosophy. This emphasised the crucial role which the Council of Europe plays as a truly pan-European organisation.
Other heads of state and government who addressed or are invited to the Assembly, are also former Assembly members – for instance, the Austrian Chancellor Mr Alfred Gusenbauer, Mr Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, Mr Sali Berisha, Prime Minister of Albania, Mr Viktor Yanukovych, Prime Minister of Ukraine or the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Mr Robert Fico – thus demonstrating the organic link that exists between the ideas and principles defended by the Assembly and national politics in member states.

I am deeply honoured that German Chancellor Mrs Angela Merkel has accepted my invitation to address the Assembly in April 2008.

During my presidency, I reinforced the role of the Assembly as a forum for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue (see Chapter 4).

Moreover, the participation of heads of leading international organisations in the framework of specific parliamentary debates brought us invaluable expertise and first-hand input on various issues developed by the Parliamentary Assembly. I refer, in this context, to the participation of Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, in the debate on the democratic oversight of the security sector in member states (Rapporteur: Mr Lluis Maria de Puig) in June 2005; that of Mr Martti Ahtisaari, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Future Status Process for Kosovo, in the debate on the current situation in Kosovo (Rapporteur: Lord Russell-Johnston), in January 2007; or of Ms Carla del Ponte, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in the debate on the co-operation of the states concerned with the ICTY in June 2007.

I have also expanded the dialogue with other European institutions, in the first place the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council, the OSCE, as well as other parliamentary assemblies with which we have co-operation agreements such as the Assembly of the Commonwealth of the Independent States, the Pan-African Assembly or the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (see Chapter 6).

On the occasion of the enlarged Parliamentary Assembly, we always welcome the participation of delegations from parliaments of non-European member states of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), including Canada, Japan and Mexico. The former Secretary-General of the OECD, Mr Donald Johnston, addressed the Parliamentary Assembly for his last time in October 2005, before his successor, Mr Angel Gurria, took over the chairmanship of this organisation and continued to provide an annual statement of the OECD in our chamber.
Meetings with the chairpersons of national delegations

As from June 2006, I initiated regular, bi-annual meetings with the chairpersons of national delegations. The main purpose of these meetings is to use the double mandate of Assembly members, and chairs of national delegations in particular, to its full potential, in order to strengthen the Council of Europe’s role in national parliaments.

While our Parliamentary Assembly only meets for four weeks a year, national parliaments can serve as powerful multipliers of its ideas and recommendations through their own parliamentary agendas. PACE members can influence public authorities in their own countries through the organisation of parliamentary debates or by putting questions to their governments. Hence I used meetings with the chairpersons of national delegations in order to discuss with them all the Assembly’s priorities and major initiatives during my presidency.

I wrote, for instance, to the Speakers of national parliaments to draw their attention to the Juncker report on “Council of Europe-European Union: a sole ambition for the European continent”. I urged the chairs of national delegations to exert pressure at the national level to ensure the recommendations made by Mr Juncker were followed through.

Following the debate in the Assembly in April 2007 on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe, I again addressed letters to the Speakers of national parliaments and to the heads of delegation. I asked that wide publicity be given to this debate in parliament and that national parliaments organise their own debates on the basis of PACE’s report and associate representatives of NGOs in the process. I stressed the high priority I attached to the report being properly followed up and its recommendations being fully implemented at national level. National parliaments are particularly well-placed to put pressure on governments to take remedial action for the shortcomings identified in the report, to ratify outstanding Council of Europe instruments, to adopt the necessary reforms, and so on. I invited the chairs of national delegations to inform me of the follow-up they have given, or plan to give, to the report.

Concerning the constantly deteriorating budgetary situation of the Council of Europe, I called on the chairs of national delegations to make sure that, in the context of national budgetary debates, an increase was requested for PACE and the European Court of Human Rights.

In June 2006, in a further letter to the chairs of national delegations, I announced the launch of the parliamentary dimension of the campaign to combat violence against women, including domestic violence. I asked them to involve their parliaments in the campaign, to organise parliamentary days of action, to adopt a solemn declaration and to appoint a member of parliament to liaise with the Assembly. Many national delegations did indeed take an active part in the campaign.

I also asked the chairs to facilitate the distribution of the handbook prepared for parliamentarians focusing on the Council of Europe’s anti-trafficking convention in national parliaments and to put pressure on governments to speed up the process of ratification of the Convention.

At the January 2007 meeting, I stated that it was unacceptable that, out of the twenty vice-presidents elected at that part-session, only two were women. PACE is firm about the need for gender balance in regard to candidates to the Court, but it also has to apply this principle in respect of its own internal functioning.
**Relations with observer delegations**

At present, three national parliaments enjoy observer status with the Assembly, those of Israel (1957), Canada (1997) and Mexico (1999). Moreover, representatives of the national parliaments of non-European member states of the OECD (Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand and the United States of America) participate every year in the enlarged debate on the activities of the OECD.

During my mandate, the main objectives of relations with the parliaments of member states, as well as parliaments enjoying observer status, were to develop co-operation with them with a view to bringing to their attention the Assembly’s work and to provide the Assembly with information on action taken in national parliaments on issues related to the Council of Europe.

As regards relations with parliaments of non-member states, the aim was to establish a political dialogue between these parliaments and the Assembly. This dialogue helps to promote the principles of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

**Committee of Ministers**

The dialogue between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Ministers takes place mainly through the communication of the Chairman-in-Office to the Assembly, as well as through the Joint Committee.

During my mandate as President of the Assembly, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, San Marino and Serbia held the rotating chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, while Slovakia has the chairmanship at the moment of expiry of my mandate. All these countries made excellent contributions to the work of our organisation, each one bringing its own specificity and fresh ideas. Two chairmanships, howe-
ver, bear a special significance for me – those of Russia and of Serbia. Both were preceded by many hesitations: would these countries be up to the standards of our organisation? Would they be able to provide a political leadership which would reaffirm the role of the Council of Europe as a leading human rights body? I personally never had any doubts in this respect. Both the chairmanships of Russia and Serbia have been a success – not just for the countries themselves, but for our organisation as a whole. They have demonstrated the huge potential of the Council of Europe to unite all the European countries around shared values and principles.

While I highly value the individual contribution of all member states to the work and development of our organisation, I consider that at institutional level, the existing statutory arrangements are no longer relevant. They may have been considered adequate almost sixty years ago, for a ten-member organisation. To ensure that our organisation takes its rightful place in today’s European architecture, the Council of Europe’s two statutory bodies can and should work together more closely.

The institutional balance in the Council of Europe needs to be redressed. The Assembly and the Committee of Ministers need a more balanced partnership.

Foreign ministers, as leading politicians in their countries, need to be much more closely involved in the functioning of the Committee of Ministers, not least to give political leadership to the diplomats present in Strasbourg. They should use the ministerial sessions in Strasbourg in order to discuss the most important political issues for European countries. Ministerial agendas must be more politically relevant and sensible: PACE’s input would help.

One useful practice that was established during my presidency is the working breakfasts between the Assembly’s Presidential Committee and the Bureau of the Committee of Ministers, which take place during each part-session.
Much greater synergy is needed on the most vital issues for the future of the Council of Europe. Member states' attitude towards the budget seriously undermines our activities and potential. A very real risk exists that this will lead to a vicious circle of funding cuts and cutting of important activities. At the same time, it is absurd that the European Union member states – which form a majority on the Committee of Ministers – chose to spend so much money on the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, which duplicates most of the work of the Council of Europe.

The Assembly should have its own budget; it should also have a far greater role in making senior appointments within its secretariat.

I have promoted these ideas during all my contacts with Chairpersons-in-office, with the authorities and the permanent representatives in Strasbourg of the countries holding the rotating chairmanship, during the Joint Committee meetings, and in the exchange of views that I held with the Ministers on the occasion of their 116th session on 19 May 2006.

Currently the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers are working on establishing a joint working party, on the proposal of Mr Andreas Gross, Chair of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities. Whilst the Joint Committee is the pre-eminent body for dialogue and co-ordination between the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, the idea behind a joint working party is to set up a more flexible form of consultation between the two bodies. The fact that it has a more limited number of participants and an informal method of operating makes it possible to have a more open debate, a genuine and spontaneous dialogue and a more detailed discussion on specific problems of common interest.

**European Court of Human Rights**

The European Court of Human Rights remains and should remain the pan-European reference in terms of standards for the protection of human rights. Its reform, set out in Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights, is vital for its ability to perform its role in the future. By helping the Court to deal more quickly with its backlog of cases, the protocol's main aim is to ensure individuals receive speedier and more effective justice.

Unfortunately the protocol has not yet entered into force as one last ratification – that of Russia – is still missing. I have used all opportunities to assist the Russian delegation to the Assembly in its efforts to promote the ratification of Protocol No. 14 by the Russian State Duma. I have also used to the full the leverage of parliamentary diplomacy during my meetings with the Russian authorities. On 2 July 2007 I made a public statement expressing my disappointment that the Russian Duma had not assented to ratification of this vital protocol, blocking its entry into force. I stated that we are all the poorer for
My Presidency 2005-2007: realities and dreams

this failure, and pointed out that it is European citizens – including from Russia – who will suffer most. I urged, once again, Russia to ratify this Protocol as soon as possible.

The delay in the ratification beyond the end of June triggered a partial renewal of the European Court, a complicated and time-consuming process.

I wish to convey my sincere thanks to the Sub-Committee on the Election of Judges to the European Court of Human Rights, which assumed this important task with a sense of grave responsibility. It held interviews with candidates during the month of September and thus enabled the Assembly to proceed, during its October 2007 part-session, to the election or re-election of a number of judges.

**Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights**

The Parliamentary Assembly has given its full political backing to the work of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, most recently in its Resolution 1581 (2007) and Recommendation 1816 (2007) on the “Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights – stock-taking and perspectives”. These texts were adopted at the October 2007 part-session and Mr Thomas Hammarberg, the present Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, took part in the debate.

I personally greatly appreciated the excellent cooperation with the office of the Commissioner and wish to pay a special tribute to Mr Hammarberg for his contribution to the Assembly’s work, especially to the annual report on the state of democracy and human rights in Europe.

I hope that the prospects for widening the Commissioner’s mandate, referred to in Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights, in the Juncker report and in the Group of Wise Persons’ report on the efficiency of the European Court of Human Rights, will materialise as soon as possible and will be backed by adequate funding.

**The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities**

The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities are the two Council of Europe bodies that are composed of representatives having a direct democratic mandate from the citizens.

The Congress and the Assembly have very much in common:

- our members have a double mandate: European on one side, and national, regional or local on the other side;
- we are a direct link to our citizens;
- we are both schools of democracy;
- we both defend decentralisation and subsidiarity;
- we both put emphasis on good governance;
- we are platforms for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;
- we are in the front line of fighting racism, anti-semitism, intolerance and xenophobia.
As I pointed out in my address to the Plenary Session of the Congress on 2 June 2005 (the plenary session on “Third Summit and Priorities of the Council of Europe”), we have to use this enormous advantage and potential.

I wish to pay tribute to the contribution made by the Congress and, in particular, to its the President, Mr Giovanni di Stasi, to the Third Council of Europe Summit, as well as to the valuable contribution that the present President of the Congress, Mr Halvdan Skard, made to the Assembly’s Annual Debate on the State of Human Rights and Democracy in Europe.

**The European Commission for Democracy through Law (“Venice Commission”)**

The Venice Commission, an enlarged agreement (open also to non-member states) composed of high-level experts in international and constitutional law, is one of the most valuable of the Council of Europe’s mechanisms and a pillar of our work on democracy and the rule of law. I really came to appreciate the value of its work when I was the Assembly’s rapporteur on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Albania. Since enlargement, we have continued to work together very closely in the Assembly’s monitoring procedure.

Our co-operation also includes issues where interpretation of international law has given rise to political controversy – notably in the context of the fight against terrorism, through the Assembly’s reports on democratic oversight of the security services, Guantánamo Bay and secret detentions. Our relationship is truly synergistic: the Venice Commission’s opinions add legal solidity to the political reports prepared by the Assembly, just as
the Assembly gives political impact to the Venice Commission’s work. This was well reflected in the Venice Commission’s contribution to the Assembly’s annual debate on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe. This co-operation has been above all facilitated by the systematic participation of members of the Assembly in Venice Commission meetings.

Despite the Venice Commission being indispensable to the whole of Europe for the promotion and protection of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, governments and most members of parliament (including the European Parliament) are, regrettably, insufficiently aware of its work.

In an effort to correct this, I have always strongly promoted the Venice Commission in my official meetings and visits. In addition to this consistent political support, I have also sought to make small practical contributions to the Venice Commission’s activities, such as when, in the Palestinian Territories, I was able to facilitate a meeting between Venice Commission experts and representatives of civil society to discuss reform of the judicial system.

I was therefore glad that before the end of my mandate, I was able to attend a meeting of the Venice Commission in person to express my great appreciation for their work and my sincere gratitude for our co-operation. I was particularly honoured on this occasion to receive the Venice Commission Award – a visible symbol of our mutual appreciation for the work we do together.

**Specialised Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms**

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**Alan Philipps**, President of the Advisory Committee of the framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Strasbourg, April 2007

**Eva Smith Asmussen**, President of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Strasbourg, April 2007

**Mauro Palma**, President of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, Strasbourg, April 2007
The leading position of the Council of Europe in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law would be unthinkable without the assiduous and high-quality work of its specialised bodies, which maintain close links with member states and provide expertise, advice and guidance in the areas of their responsibility. They make a great contribution to the work of the Assembly, especially to its monitoring exercise, but also far beyond.

I wish to thank Mrs Polonca Koncar, the President of the European Committee of Social Rights, Mrs Silvia Casale and Mr Mauro Palma, successive Presidents of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, Mrs Eva Smith Asmussen, President of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and Mr Alan Phillips, President of the Advisory Committee of the framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, for their input and participation in the Assembly’s annual debate on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe, and for their ideas for future development of our co-operation.

Parliamentary diplomacy

Parliamentary diplomacy is the active involvement of parliamentarians and parliamentary institutions in situations of political crisis and deadlock. Where governments find it difficult or fail altogether to find compromises, parliamentary diplomacy can make a breakthrough by the use of soft power and dialogue. It is especially important that both the ruling parties and the opposition of each country are represented in the Assembly. Friendship and political networks built in our Assembly have become an invaluable contribution to finding solutions to problems and conflicts back in home countries.

With its flexibility and immediate contacts with citizens’ everyday concerns, parliamentary diplomacy must be recognised as an essential complement to governmental diplomacy. Our Assembly has been a pioneer of parliamentary diplomacy in Europe and is constantly building upon its experience to make best use of its increasing importance. The diplomatic instruments provided by our Assembly neither duplicate nor replace traditional governmental diplomacy. On the contrary, they are complementary, enriching and stimulating traditional forms of diplomacy.

I discussed the matter of greater parliamentary diplomacy on the occasion of the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments, held in Estonia in May 2006. We all agreed that through parliamentary diplomacy, we want to – and must – contribute to stability, peace and prosperity on our continent.

During my mandate, I often used the method of parliamentary diplomacy to mediate between different national delegations within the Council of Europe and to find ways of solving conflicts and overcome tensions between our member states. I made use of the human dimension of diplomacy and the immediacy of face-to-face talks.
In June 2005 and in October 2006, I hosted the leading representatives of Russia and Georgia to discuss current issues in their relationship. I encouraged them to make use of the Assembly as the ideal forum for dialogue and to find ways of improving their interaction.

Shortly after my first official journey to the Caucasus region in 2005, I invited the heads of the national delegations of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to my office to discuss questions of utmost importance for subregional stability, in particular in regard to unsolved border issues between the countries concerned.

In April 2006, I met with the President and the Vice-President of the Liechtenstein Parliament, Mr Klaus Wanger and Mr Ivo Klein, to discuss the consequences of Liechtenstein's constitutional changes, which led to an increase of political power for the constitutional monarch.

In view of rising tensions between Russia and Estonia during the early part of 2007, I invited the delegations of both countries during the January session to my office. I stressed that it was in the interest of both countries to invest heavily in their relationship and that a broader and deeper partnership between them is necessary for peace, stability and eventually progress in the whole of Europe.

At my invitation, the Cypriot, the Turkish and Greek delegations held discussions, also with the participation of representatives of the Cypriot Turkish community, in April 2007, to promote dialogue and reconciliation. I encouraged each party involved to contribute to improving the situation and bringing the two communities together, in particular by organising bi-communal activities.

In June 2007, on the occasion of the presentation of the Marty report, the Romanian delegation expressed their great disappointment with its outcome. I immediately organised a meeting with the Romanian members; later, while visiting Romania on the occasion of the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly (Sibiu, 4-6 September 2007), I also took the occasion to meet members of the Romanian delegation, along with Mrs Nicolae, chairperson of the Romanian Senate investigation committee. I defended the Assembly's position and argued that a boycott by their delegation would not be any solution to their grievance; instead, they should make use of the opportunities available through the Assembly's rules and procedures to put across their point of view.

At the same time, I expressed my great appreciation for the important and constructive role played by the delegation in the Assembly. Concerning the delegation's proposed action, I strongly advised them to reflect very carefully and, at least, first assess the situation in their political groups. I am very glad that the Romanian delegation has continued to participate actively in the work of the Assembly.
Improving the Assembly’s institutional visibility

My knowledge both of the Council of Europe and the European Union (especially through my participation in the European Convention) have given me the strong conviction that it is vital for the two institutions to cooperate, on the basis of their respective added value. Not only do we share the same values and principles: peace, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, social justice and prosperity. To me, complementarity and joint action whenever possible are a matter of political responsibility and accountability to Europe’s citizens. This is the best way to enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of activities and the waste of public money.

During my presidency I had permanent and intensive contacts and meetings with high representatives of the European Commission, the EU presidency and the President of the European Parliament, including during several working visits to Brussels. On 11 June 2007 I participated in the joint parliamentary meeting organised by the European Parliament and the German EU presidency on “The Future of Europe”, including a working group on a new draft EU Treaty.

Concerning relations with the European Union, my priorities during my mandate were to ensure that, firstly, the Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and the Council of Europe would be based on Prime Minister Juncker’s report. Secondly, I tried to encourage the EU to make systematic use of the expertise involved in the Council of Europe’s mechanisms and instruments. Thirdly, I sought to integrate the norms and values of the Council of Europe into the European Neighbourhood Policy. Fourthly, I tried to discourage the European Union from setting up new institutions and organs that duplicate work that for the past fifty years has been carried out by the Council of Europe. And, last but not least, I promoted the enlargement of the quadripartite meetings to include a parliamentary dimension with the participation of the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

I also strived to promote the idea that the European Union should not operate as a bloc within the Council of Europe, since this would seriously undermine the meaning and future of our organisation.
The Juncker Report

At the Warsaw Summit of the Council of Europe, the heads of state and government decided to create a new framework which would allow for enhanced co-operation and interaction between the Council of Europe and the European Union in areas of common concern. On the Assembly’s initiative, they gave Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, a political mandate to prepare a report on the relationship between the two institutions.

It was no chance that Mr Juncker chose the Assembly as the forum in which to present his report on “Council of Europe-European Union: a sole ambition for the European continent”. The same debate, on 11 April 2006, also saw the participation of Mr Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, Prime Minister of Romania and then Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe; Mr Wolfgang Schüssel, Federal Chancellor of Austria and President of the European Council; and Mr José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission.

In his address, Mr Barroso agreed that the architecture of European institutions needed to be modernised to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The future of all Europeans was too intertwined to allow a partial approach. “Given the resource constraints that we face, there is simply no scope for duplication and to maximise the effectiveness of our actions, we must maximise co-operation and co-ordination between different organisations,” he said.

The Assembly gave its full support to Prime Minister Juncker’s report. It fully reaffirms the recommendations made at the Third Summit and provides a clear and ambitious political vision for the future of the two institutions: a partnership organised on a permanent basis without rivalry, built on common values. It also defines the Council of Europe as the main pan-European reference point on human rights.

I promoted the conclusions of the Juncker report during all my meetings with European leaders. Although some of its specific proposals, such as the Memorandum of Understanding, have already been implemented, other far-reaching, long-term recommendations still need an adequate political response from the Committee of Ministers.
Mr Juncker promoted and defended the Council of Europe more than any other politician. I therefore took great pleasure in presenting him with the highest award in my gift, a Presidential Distinction, which I inscribed “to a great European, dedicated to the Council of Europe”.

**The Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union**

The Memorandum of Understanding is one of the main specific results of the Warsaw Summit and the Juncker report. Still, reaching even this stage was not easy. The initial version of the Memorandum lacked real, concrete proposals and did not enshrine the Council of Europe’s role as the leading pan-European organisation for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Some of the most important omissions concerned the parliamentary dimension. Three consecutive Council of Europe chairmanships worked on the text. In April 2006 the Assembly adopted Recommendation 1743, where it presented proposals to be taken into account for the Memorandum. After a new draft had been submitted to the Committee of Ministers, I presented amendments which were approved by the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly. On 19 April 2007 the Assembly adopted Opinion No. 262 to the Committee of Ministers on the draft Memorandum of Understanding.

Finally, the Memorandum was signed on 23 May 2007. While the Assembly’s views are not fully reflected in the final text, several of the amendments which it proposed were taken into account, either in full or modified form. We now need to focus on how this important document can be implemented in practice so that it serves as an effective and dynamic tool for further co-operation.
Together, PACE (members of national parliaments from 47 countries) and the European Parliament (directly elected MEPs) represent the parliamentary dimension of Europe.

Throughout my mandate, co-operation with the European Parliament was excellent and ever improving. I wish to convey my warmest thanks to the successive European Parliament Presidents, Mr Josep Borrell and Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, as well as to the former Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs Mr Elmar Brok. The fact that Mr Pöttering stressed the importance of our co-operation during his inaugural speech sent a powerful political signal.

During my mandate, the co-operation between our two parliamentary bodies found its most accomplished expression in the signature of the agreement on the strengthening of co-operation between PACE and the European Parliament on 28 November 2007. This agreement adds an essential parliamentary dimension to the Memorandum of Understanding, agreed at governmental level.

The agreement also formalises an extremely fruitful form of co-operation, the meetings between the PACE Presidential Committee and the European Parliament’s Conference of Presidents (both composed of the chairmen of its political groups). Two such meetings took place during my mandate, on 20 October 2005 and on 30 August 2007 in Brussels. Besides work on the draft co-operation agreement, these meetings served as a useful platform for exchanging views on issues of common interest. The meetings in Brussels on 30 August 2007, for instance, concentrated on relations with Russia and on the development of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. The latter subject gave birth to an ambitious initiative, a joint conference on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue which in principle should take place in the autumn of 2008. It was furthermore agreed, and stipulated in a joint declaration at the end of the meeting, that the smooth functioning of the European Court on Human Rights is in the best interests of all European citizens and that the question of its financing should be of joint concern.
On 25 June 2007 the President of the European Parliament, Mr Pöttering, addressed the Assembly. He mentioned, among other things, the usefulness of the Assembly’s monitoring procedures, and the need for much closer co-operation between the European Parliament and the Assembly concerning the EU Neighbourhood Policy and, in particular, the whole issue of EU enlargement. Mr Pöttering referred to co-operation at committee level of both institutions, and to the common initiative of the EU and the Council of Europe to declare 10 October a European Day against the death penalty.

At committee level, I wish in particular to emphasise the co-operation between PACE’s Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and the European Parliament’s Temporary Committee on the alleged use of European countries by the CIA for the transport and illegal detention of prisoners (TDIP) during the preparation of the Assembly’s report on Alleged secret detentions and unlawful inter-state transfers of detainees involving Council of Europe member states (Rapporteur Mr Dick Marty, Switzerland). European Commission Vice-President Mr Franco Frattini addressed the Assembly debate in June 2006 and also provided invaluable support for Mr Marty’s information requests addressed to Eurocontrol and the EU Satellite Centre in Torrejon.

As was pointed out in the joint declaration at the end of the meeting on 30 August 2007 in Brussels, much more can be achieved in a number of other areas where the two institutions can combine their respective strengths: in particular, in the promotion of democracy, including co-operation in joint electoral observation work, and in furthering respect for human rights; in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue; in the setting of basic legal standards within Europe; in the process of further EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as in the EU’s partnership with Russia; and finally in the fight against corruption, trafficking in human beings and domestic violence.

**The necessary accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights**

Throughout my mandate, I have defended the need for the European Union to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights. This is the best way to ensure that the Union adheres to the same standards as all other public authorities in Europe. Following the Brussels European Council meeting on 21–22 June 2007, I wrote to Mr Pöttering and Mr Brock strongly encouraging them to ensure that the Reform Treaty contains a clear and immediate commitment, accompanied by all the necessary technical preparations (including giving the Union legal personality) for European Union accession to the European Convention on Human Rights.

The fact that Article 6 of the new Reform Treaty establishes the legal basis for EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights is a major achievement. Until the Reform Treaty enters into force, however, all the necessary provisions for the smooth and efficient implementation of this provision have to be put in place.
The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Shortly prior to my taking office as President of the Assembly, the European Commission began consultation on the establishment of a fundamental rights agency, in response to a suggestion made at the European Council of December 2003. Whilst the European Council had referred only to “the importance of human rights data collection and analysis with a view to defining Union policy in this field”, it soon became apparent that the Commission had a much more ambitious project in mind. Firmly believing that the Council of Europe is and must remain the primary forum for protecting human rights in Europe, given its unique instruments and mechanisms and its unrivalled experience and expertise, I was determined to do my utmost to prevent this new agency from duplicating and thereby undermining the Council of Europe’s activities.

The Assembly had also expressed its deep concern: it adopted the Resolution 1427 (2005) and Recommendation 1696 (2005) critical of plans to set up a fundamental rights agency within the European Union. Subsequently, on the occasion of the extended debate on relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union on 11 April 2006, the speakers – Chancellor Schüssel of Austria, President of the Council of the European Union, Prime Minister Popescu-Tariceanu of Romania, representing the chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Prime Minister Juncker of Luxembourg, who presented his report on the same issue, and European Commission President Barroso – all agreed that the Council of Europe must remain the reference for human rights in Europe. The Assembly then adopted a very strong position in Recommendation 1744 (2006) on the Council of Europe and the proposed fundamental rights agency of the European Union.

With this strong institutional support behind me, therefore, I took every opportunity to argue against the creation of an agency that would duplicate the work of the Council of Europe, damaging the overall European human rights protection system based on the Council of Europe and wasting taxpayers’ money in the process. In speeches, meetings and correspondence with European political leaders and national parliamentarians and published articles – including proposals on the wording of the agency’s mandate sent to European Commission Vice-President Frattini, written submissions to the UK House of Lords and a letter to European Voice – I strongly and consistently defended our position.

The agency was duly created and, although there still exists a serious risk that it will duplicate the Council of Europe – especially if, as is so often the case in such circumstances, its mandate its expansively interpreted and extended over time – I can at least be relieved that the damage was not as serious as first feared. Nevertheless, I will continue to be vigilant at both national and European level to ensure that no harm is done by this agency to the Council of Europe.

The European Commission’s proposed Multi-annual Framework for the Agency however gives rise to serious concern about duplication with the activities of the Council of Europe. It is hard to understand why the budget of the Agency would grow up to nearly 30 million euros whilst, at the same time, the functioning of the European Court of Human Rights is under threat due to the lack of budgetary means.

Quadripartite meetings

At my initiative, in September 2006 the then President of the European Parliament Mr Borrell and I sent a joint letter to the Chairpersons of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Council of the EU regarding the participation of PACE and the European Parliament in quadripartite meetings between the EU and the Council of Europe. I have always
considered that these high-level meetings between both institutions should have a parliamentary dimension, as this is already the case in meetings with the OSCE. On the one hand, Council of Europe decision-making is in the exclusive hands of a body usually composed of unelected officials; on the other hand, the European Union is criticised for its democratic deficit. We must therefore answer the call of Europe’s citizens for European organisations to be more democratic.

Unfortunately, the Committee of Ministers and the European Commission do not seem to fully realise the importance of the added parliamentary dimension to these fora. Only during the Russian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers were PACE and the European Parliament invited to participate in the quadripartite meeting.

**PACE’S RELATIONS WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES**

Besides the institutional links developed with the European Parliament and the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU), the Parliamentary Assembly has co-operation agreements with a number of international parliamentary assemblies of different geographical scope: regional, sub-continental, continental and transcontinental. The list includes the Nordic Council, the Benelux Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Co-operation (PABSEC), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS), the Parliamentary Assembly of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Interparliamentary Union (IPU).

Although these assemblies have a different status, the main objective of co-operation that I have pursued with them was to spread and reaffirm our values and principles worldwide, to develop intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, to develop parliamentary diplomacy and to promote the parliamentary dimension of international organisations. I am particularly proud that certain continental parliamentary assemblies, such as the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA), have been created and are developing using the model of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

During my presidency, I also tried to strengthen and to emphasise the position and visibility of our Assembly in this international institutional landscape.

**European assemblies**

› **OSCE Parliamentary Assembly**

I have worked to strengthen the relations of our Assembly with the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Parliamentary Assembly. I have held meetings both with former OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Mr Alcee Hastings (who addressed the Assembly during its winter 2005 part-session) and the current President Mr Goran Lennmarker. In the field of election observation, the Assembly has continued to strengthen its cordial working relations with both the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and ODIHR, despite the sometimes tense relationship between these two members of the OSCE family.
During my presidency, I have always promoted a strong and close relationship with the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPA CIS). It unites states many of which are also members of our organisation. The CIS – together with our Assembly – has contributed significantly to overcome age-old suspicions and rivalries in Europe and supported one of the Council of Europe’s main aims: to build a Europe without dividing lines.

Throughout my mandate as PACE President, cooperation with the Interparliamentary Assembly of the CIS has been excellent. We developed exemplary working relations with its Chairman, Mr Sergey Mironov, Speaker of the Council of the Federation, with whom we signed a statement on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Cooperation Agreement between PACE and IPA CIS.

In the context of its 15th anniversary, I had the honour to address the IPA CIS in St. Petersburg on 31 May 2007. In my speech, I stressed that European and pan-continental unity must be based on the values of the Council of Europe. I emphasised the importance of the abolition of the death penalty and of ensuring freedom of speech and free and fair elections.

I also spoke at the International Conference on “Intercultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue” on 1 June 2007, which was organised jointly by PACE and IPA CIS. I stressed the importance of the conference themes and reiterated my proposal to give an official status to Churches within the Council of Europe.

In June 2005, I welcomed a delegation of the Nordic Council, whose members used the opportunity to inform themselves about the work and procedures of our organisation and in particular of our Assembly.

**UN system**

Our Assembly has taken always the position that a parliamentary dimension should be introduced to the work of the UN. This was the spirit of Resolution 1476 (2006) on the parliamentary dimension of the United Nations (Rapporteur: Mrs Tana de Zulueta, Italy) which was adopted by the Assembly in January 2006. The Assembly called for a durable and forward-looking reform of the United Nations. The aim of it would be to redress the democratic deficit in global governance and bring the UN closer to the people. The process should culminate with the inclusion in the UN system of a parliamentary assembly with consultative functions.

On the occasion of this stimulating debate, I welcomed Mr Jan Eliasson, President of the 60th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. His speech made an excellent demonstration of a point that I raise often in
order to highlight a particular strength of our Assembly: our members’ double mandate. This mandate allows them to promote the Assembly’s ideas within their national governments and, through them, major international fora such as the UN.

**Worldwide parliamentary associations**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), of which PACE is an associate member, is a worldwide forum for raising the profile of our Assembly. I attended two IPU sessions, the 112th Assembly in Manila on 3-8 April 2005 and the 116th Assembly in Denpasar on 29 April-2 May 2007. In Manila, I strongly encouraged the establishment of an Asian Parliamentary Assembly on the model of PACE. I also spoke in the general debate on “the impact of domestic and international policies on the situation of women”. I concentrated on the Council of Europe’s action with regard to trafficking in human beings, women’s participation in politics and domestic violence against women.

My speech at the 116th IPU Assembly dwelt on the issues of climate change (the subject of the general debate), respect for other people’s beliefs through intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, respect for the will of the people expressed through free and fair elections, and respect for fundamental human rights in the fight against terrorism.

**Continent-to-continent co-operation**

The Parliamentary Assembly is also a forum for promoting our core values beyond European borders. I have therefore strived to promote a closer relationship with our sister parliamentary assemblies in Africa, Asia and South America.

During my presidency, a co-operation agreement was signed in April 2005 between the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union (PAP) and PACE. The main aim of this agreement is to enhance regular co-operation between both assemblies and to establish a political dialogue, particularly with a view to promoting the principles of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms on the African continent. On the occasion of the June session 2005, I welcomed an African delegation to our chamber. I also met with the President of the PAP Mrs Gertrude I. Mongella in St Petersburg on the occasion of the 28th session of the IPA CIS. I invited our African counterparts to study our working procedures and to take part in committee meetings and other activities. Senior staff members made a working visit to the Assembly in May 2007.

The Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) also used PACE as a model for an interparliamentary assembly in Asia. The idea was pro-
Promoted by the Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, Mr José de Venecia, during his Chairmanship of the Association of Asian Parliamentarians for Peace (AAPP), the forerunner of the APA. The Hanns Seidel Foundation has been very active in taking the idea further and promoting co-operation between our two bodies.

During my mandate, I therefore twice welcomed delegations from APA to discuss further co-operation between our assemblies. During the PACE 2005 summer part-session the then AAPP Chairman, the Speaker of the Parliament of Pakistan, Mr Chaudhry Amir Hussein, and Mr José de Venecia, as a Chairman of the Advisory Council, addressed PACE’s plenary sitting. The APA constituted itself in Tehran on 12 November 2006 and held its first session under the Chairmanship of Iranian Speaker Mr Gholamali Haddad Adel. Unfortunately, despite my invitation to the October 2007 part-session, Mr Haddad Adel decided to turn it down at the last moment. The Indonesian Speaker, Mr H.R. Agung Laksono, who will be the next APA president, led the delegation and addressed the Assembly on 4 October 2007.

In my welcome address I stated that the creation of the APA was an important initiative designed to enhance regional stability and the prospects of integration in various fields. Mr Laksono believed that interaction between the APA and PACE would be beneficial to peace and security in the world. A lasting relationship could be promoted by focusing on the two Assemblies’ democratic character and their authority as promoters of the rule of law. During question time, he said that poverty was the number one issue facing Asian countries. He proposed that there should be a joint committee for more frequent inter-actions.

Furthermore, representatives from the Andean community of Nations and their Andean Parliament came to Strasbourg to study our Assembly and to investigate ways of closer co-operation in April 2007.

“Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are not the aim in itself. They are the prerequisites for stability and economic growth and, ultimately, also for international peace and security in the world. That’s why we must also make active our concern for these common values as part of people’s daily lives, by reminding them of what is at stake.”

Statement at the 116th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Indonesia, Nusa Duaa, 1 May 2007
Bringing the Assembly closer to the citizens of Europe

Democratic government is not just about constitutions and institutions: it is about process and participation. Ownership of the democratic process must remain with the people. Political developments in our continent clearly demonstrate this. Democracy must be part of people’s everyday experience.

People need to know that their participation counts. They need to know that it is worthwhile to follow debates, to take an interest in election campaigns, to vote. For politicians to represent the people, persons from all walks of life must be inspired to join political parties and to stand for election to public office. If not, a gap emerges between the electorate and the politicians. There is growing concern about this gap in many European countries.

Politicians and political parties alone are not enough. Democracy needs a strong, pluralistic media and a diverse and active civil society, free to organise and agitate. Civil society must be an integral part of the democratic process, systematically providing constructive criticism and new ideas.

Increasingly, politicians are not exercising leadership, with the result that the political process lacks credibility. We must involve citizens in political life, in order to restore an effective decision-making process. Equally, we must reinforce democracy, human rights and the rule of law as an inherent part of the education system, as well as the teaching of European history and of the realities of contemporary Europe.

I have made the development of contacts with civil society a central theme of my Parliamentary Assembly Presidency.

We parliamentarians, as the peoples’ democratically elected representatives, have the duty and responsibility to ensure that the peoples’ choices are respected. We can bring our national matters to the international level and, at the same time, bring the international dimension into the debates in the national parliaments. But, we have to explore these opportunities in a better, more systematic way.

Not least also by working very closely, in a constructive partnership, with almost 400 civil society associations.
In 1973 the Speakers and Presidents of the European Parliamentary Assemblies, together with the President of the Assembly of the Council of Europe and the President of the Assembly of the European Communities, met for the first time in Paris. They considered that contacts of this kind could be beneficial and would contribute to the growth of European awareness in their respective countries. These conferences could also help the study of all problems arising with the adaptation of representative parliamentary democracies to conditions in the modern world.

Since 1975 further conferences were held at regular intervals and with an ever-increasing number of participating parliaments, corresponding to the member states of the Council of Europe and to the Parliamentary Assembly’s Special Guests and Observers.

Under the auspices of PACE, the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament meets every two years. It is composed of Speakers or Presidents of Parliament of the Council of Europe member states as well as the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament and the Assembly of the Western European Union. The Speakers of PACE Observer parliaments are invited as well. In addition, other European regional or sub-regional and international parliamentary assemblies may be invited by the Assembly.

I attended and addressed the European Conference of Presidents of Parliaments organised by the Estonian Parliament in Tallinn, Estonia, on 30-31 May 2006. Some 40 Speakers and Presidents of Parliament from the 46 Council of Europe member states, as well as the heads of the European Parliament, the Nordic Council, the WEU Assembly and Benelux, participated in this parliamentary summit on the themes “Bridge-building through parliamentary diplomacy” and “The role of parliaments in promoting pluralistic democracy at home and abroad”. I met many Speakers on this occasion. I also had a very fruitful meeting with Mr Borrell, President of the European Parliament.

In my speech and concluding remarks, I insisted on the necessity of bringing politics closer to the people, so that the voices of European citizens would be heard at every level through their freely and fairly elected representatives. Parliamentary diplomacy is an efficient tool and it should therefore be recognised as an essential complement to governmental diplomacy. But I also pointed out that the parliamentary dimension of international organisations should be enhanced.
through exchanges of views on issues of common concern;
through exploratory diplomacy and the provision of “good offices” in times of international tension;
through election observation missions;
as fellow students in a “school of democracy”;
by scrutinising international organisations’ activities, so that they promote democracy more effectively and are themselves more democratic.

The next conference will be held in Strasbourg on 22-23 May 2008. The themes will be “Parliaments and civil society” and “National parliaments and the Council of Europe: promoting the core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law”.

**Forum for the Future of Democracy**

The Forum for the Future of Democracy was established as an open and flexible platform for discussing democratic evolution. The idea originated in the Assembly’s preparations for the Warsaw Summit, shortly after I became President of the Assembly.

The Forum has now been hosted by three very different Council of Europe member states – Poland, Russia and Sweden (the 2008 Forum will be held in Spain) – each one bringing its own priorities and perspectives to the exercise. I participated in all three forums and I am pleased to see the way in which our idea has developed and grown. This is a wonderful illustration of our organisation’s greatest strength: uniting different countries around our common European values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, whilst respecting the particularities of each.

On 3-4 November 2005 I attended the Launch Meeting of the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Warsaw, organised by the Polish government on the theme of “civic participation”. In my speech, I reminded participants that democracy relied on real freedoms and enthusiastic, effective participation. Otherwise, the political process would lack credibility. I described the task of the Forum as not merely talking about the future of democracy but also about the quality of our democracies, since it is vital to help ensure a future for democracy in Europe. It is all the more important that, as the world changes, democracy remains relevant and alive. Because it is only democracy, when coupled with respect for human rights and the rule of law, that can ensure the conditions for economic growth and the material well-being of our citizens. I also proposed several ideas about how to
My Presidency 2005-2007: realities and dreams

I developed the Forum in order to make it as relevant as possible. On 18 October 2006, I spoke at the opening of the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Moscow, which was examining the role of political parties in democracy-building.

In my speech, I paid tribute to the work of assassinated journalist Anna Politkovskaya and called on the Russian authorities to carry out a thorough investigation in order to bring those responsible to justice. In this connection, I stressed the crucial importance of the freedom of the media, which is one of the pillars of democracy. State authorities are responsible not only for the legal framework for journalism, but also for the general climate in which journalists are working.

My key message to the participants of the conference concentrated on the principles on which we must build political life in our countries, mainly:

- unconditional respect for fundamental values and freedoms in all circumstances, including freedom of the media, which is the essential public corrective mechanism of political life;
- having the courage to defend these values, even in cases when a majority of our citizens have a different opinion – the death penalty can be taken as an example: it is unacceptable, even if, in many countries, it still commands wide support;
- the need to be an example to our citizens, both in private and public life, as regards the essential human values of integrity, honesty and compassion;
- competing with our ideas and programmes in fair and free elections;
- respecting the diversity of political opinion and respecting the opposition;
- staying close to civil society, which systematically generates new ideas and constructive criticism.

I also stressed the need for party-building at a ‘transnational level’, because if political issues go global, political parties cannot afford not to.

The 3rd session of the Forum for the Future of Democracy took place in Stockholm/Sigtuna, in Sweden, on 13-15 June 2007. I held on that occasion a series of meetings with high-ranking Swedish and foreign politicians who were present at the Forum, as well as with NGOs.

In my opening speech, I discussed how the Assembly was taking advantage of social and technological change to reinvigorate itself, using the example of the debate on our annual report on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe and our pioneering work on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. I also underlined that democracy had to be above all the business of the people and their elected representatives, emphasising the central role that the Assembly played in the Forum itself.

Each Forum has brought further improvement along with its own specificity. As I have stated throughout its existence, the Forum needs a more varied composition, with greater representation of grass-roots, non-governmental organisations, media and political parties. A “bottom-up” rather than a “top-down” approach is preferable, driven by civil society within a space made available by governments. Governmental representatives should be invited to participate in response to civil society initiatives, rather than vice versa.

Here are the main principles on which I believe the future Forum meetings should be based:

- the Forum needs to bring together the widest possible variety of parties
with a real and immediate interest: civil society, journalists, academics, politicians and political parties, civil servants, and so on. There must be a proper balance between these groups, in order to achieve genuine, pluralistic representation of society as a whole;

- the Forum must not duplicate the work of the Council of Europe’s existing organs and mechanisms, namely the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities or the Liaison Committee for the international NGOs that enjoy participatory status.

At my suggestion, the Parliamentary Assembly has proceeded to a thorough evaluation of the Forum meetings with a view to fully developing the great potential of the Forum idea. Our main concern, of course, is strengthening its parliamentary dimension. It has been suggested that the Advisory Board, which is tasked with the preparation of the sessions of the Forum, should become a genuinely “Quadrilogue” body in which the four main stakeholders (the Committee of Ministers, the Assembly, the Congress, and the INGOs Conference) take part and come to conclusions on an equal footing in such matters as the choice of the theme(s) for the respective sessions.

**Co-operation with civil society**

Civil society, including non-governmental organisations, the media and academia, is a vital link between the people and public life and an essential source of information and inspiration for politicians. Indeed, it is often the case that civil society organisations are closer to and more aware of the needs and concerns of the people than are elected politicians, even in the parliamentary democracies of Europe.

The priority that I have given during my presidency to relations with civil society can be illustrated best through my programmes during official visits. My practice was always to request meetings with representatives of civil society – preferably at the beginning of the visit, so as to obtain independent and objective information on the situation in the country. These meetings were also an important opportunity for me to show my support for a free, independent and active civil society,
an important act in states where civil society can be subject to pressure, even repression from the authorities. Whether, for example, in Cyprus, where I was told that even certain parliamentarians had sought to curtail the activities of NGOs involved in bicommunal projects, or in Russia, following the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, I spoke clearly and strongly in defence of these often brave defenders of our common values.

In January 2006 I addressed the Council of Europe Conference of International NGOs, expressing a strong desire that we could enhance our joint activities, including on issues such as intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the integration of migrants. In particular, I argued for close co-operation to ensure that civil society would in future be much more intimately involved in the Forum for the Future of Democracy. I have also held several meetings with its Chairperson, Mrs Annelise Oeschger, and am glad that co-operation between our two bodies has continued and developed.

I am especially pleased that Mr Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, with whom I enjoy an excellent personal and working relationship, has also made co-operation with civil society a priority. I was glad, therefore, that we were able to jointly host a
round table on “human rights challenges and opportunities for Europe” on the occasion of the Assembly’s debate on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe, in April 2007. This was another opportunity to express my support and to encourage more intense, synergistic relations between civil society and the organs of the Council of Europe.

The following day, during the debate, I invited leading representatives of civil society to address the plenary Assembly, for the first time ever. The speeches by Ms Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International, and Mr Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch, brought a perspective and experience to our debate that would otherwise have been sorely missing.

On the occasion of the Assembly’s debate on Mr Marty’s second report on secret detentions, I formally recognised the contribution of Human Rights Watch to bringing the original allegations to light and thereafter pursuing them, in co-operation with the Assembly, through the award of a Presidential Distinction to the organisation. In my view, this is the least that some organisations and individuals deserve.

Another aspect of my ambition to bring the Assembly closer to the citizens of Europe was my close co-operation with major foundations. I very much appreciated the support and the commitment of foundations such as the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Hanns Seidel Foundation or the Kolping Society in the promotion of our values and activities.
Memorable moments

With Fabienne Keller, Mayor of Strasbourg, Strasbourg, January 2005

With former Presidents of the PACE
From left to right:
Peter Schieder
2002-2005,
Leni Fischer
1996-1999,
Anders Björck
1989-1991,
Lord Russell Johnston
1999-2002,
Louis Jung
1986-1989,
Strasbourg, April 2005

With Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General
Strasbourg, June 2005
Memorable moments

With
ALBERT II,
Prince of Monaco
Monaco, September 2005

With
ASMA JAHANGIR,
Special Rapporteur on
Freedom of Religion or
belief
Strasbourg, October 2005

With
KOSTAS KARAMANLIS,
Prime Minister of Greece
Athens, February 2006
Memorable moments

With José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission
Strasbourg, April 2006

With Benita Ferrero-Waldner, European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy
Brussels, June 2006

With Marja van Bijsterveldt, Chairperson of the Dutch Christian-Democrats and Murat Mercan, Head of the Turkish delegation to the PACE
Strasbourg, June 2006
Memorable moments

With Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany
Berlin, December 2006

With Jaime Gama, Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Portugal and José Vera Jardim, Head of the Portuguese delegation to the PACE
Lisbon, June 2006

With Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Founder and President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation
Strasbourg, June 2007
Memorable moments

With **Giuseppe Vedovato**
former PACE President
1972-1975
Strasbourg,
June 2007

With **Jean-Pierre Jouyet**
French Minister of State for European Affairs
and **Rama Yade**
French Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights,
Paris,
July 2007

**Maxime Verhagen**
Dutch Foreign Affairs Minister,
awarding **René van der Linden**
with Commander in the Order of Orange-Nassau
The Hague,
September 2007

*My Presidency 2005-2007: realities and dreams*
My Presidency 2005-2007: realities and dreams

Memorable moments

With Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, Rome, Septembre 2007

With Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of the Republic of Estonia, Tallinn, Septembre 2007

With Aigars Kalvitis, Prime Minister of Latvia, Riga, September 2007
Memorable moments

With Gediminas Kirkilas, Prime Minister of Lithuania, Vilnius, September 2007

René van der Linden is awarded with the Légion d’Honneur, The Hague, November 2007

With Ivan Gasparovic, President of Slovakia, Bratislava, November 2007

My Presidency 2005-2007: realities and dreams
René van der Linden  
curriculum vitae

Born in Eys-Wittem, Netherlands, on 14 December 1943  
Married, three children

**Education**  
Economics: International Studies  
Catholic Economics Faculty, University of Tilburg (1966-1970)

**Present and previous main functions**  
- Member of the First Chamber (Senate) of the States-General of the Netherlands (from 1999)  
- President of the Committee for European cooperation of the First Chamber of the States-General (since 2002)  
- Member of the Second Chamber of the States-General of the Netherlands (1977-1986 and 1988-1998)  
- Member of COSAC (Conference of Community and European Affairs Committees of Parliaments of the European Union) (since 2003)  
- Member of the Benelux Interparliamentary Assembly (1977-1986 and since 2003)  
- Member of the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU) (since 1989)  
- Member of the European Convention (March 2002-July 2003)  
- Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for European Affairs (1986-1988)  
- Member of the cabinet of European Commissioner Pierre Lardinois (1973-1977) and European Commissioner Henk Vredeling (1977)  
- Civil servant, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries of the Netherlands (1971-1973)  
- Teacher of economics (1969)

**Other posts**  
- President and member of several cultural and charity foundations  
- Member of the Advisory Board of the United World College  
- Chairman of the Board of the Maastricht School of Management (since 1999)  
- Chairman of the Dutch Association of Potatoes, Fruits and Vegetable Procession Industries  
- Member of the Board of Trustees of the “Floriade”  
- Advisor to several international companies

**Distinctions**  
- Commandeur dans l’Ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur (2007)  
- Commander in the Order of Orange-Nassau (2007)  
- Knight of the Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of St Agata (2007)  
- Honorary Plaquette of Bulgaria (2007)  
- Philippine Congressional Medal of Achievement (2005)  
- Holy order of St Gregorius the Great (2004)  
- Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau (1998)  
- Knight in the Order of the Lion of the Netherlands (1988)  
- Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (1986)
Appendices
Appendix 1
Visits and meetings
of President van der Linden
from 2005 to 2007

Visits in 2005

1. Official visit to Paris (23-24 February 2005)
2. Working visit to Moscow (10-12 March 2005)
3. Working visit to Luxembourg (23 March 2005)
5. 112th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Manila, 3-8 April 2005)
6. St Petersburg International Parliamentary Conference dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition in World War II (St Petersburg, 15 April 2005)
7. Working visit to Brussels: meetings with Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, and Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament (Brussels, 19-20 April 2005)
8. Official visit to Rome (3-4 May 2005)
10. Third Summit of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005)
11. Intervention at the Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 2 June 2005)
12. Working visit to UEFA Headquarters (Nyon, 3 June 2005)
13. Meeting with Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), (Brussels, 13 June 2005)
14. Meeting with José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission (Brussels, 13 June 2005)
15. Meeting with Bureau of the “Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie” (Brussels, 4 July 2005)
16. Visit of the Presidential Committee to Ukraine (5-8 July 2005)
17. Official visits to the Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan (18-23 August 2005)
20. Joint meeting between the Presidential Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament (Brussels, 20 October 2005)
22. Official visit to Albania (23-26 October 2005)
23. Launch of the Forum for Democracy (Warsaw, 3 November 2005)
24. Official visit to Turkey (9-13 November 2005)
25. 115th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 16-17 November 2005)
27. Working visit to Brussels (7-8 December 2005)

Visits in 2006

28. Official visit to Greece (7-12 February 2006)
29. Conference on Belarus (Prague, 22-23 February 2006)
30. 15th high-level “3+3” meeting (Brussels, 30 January 2006)
31. Working visit to Brussels (20 March 2006) - conference on the European social model and other meetings
32. Meeting with the Vatican, audience with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI (Vatican, 3 April 2006)
33. Participation in the special session of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, to celebrate its first centenary, and in the Conference on European Parliamentarianism (St Petersburg, 27-28 April 2006)
34. Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 17-19 May 2006)
35. COSAC meeting and official visit to Austria (22-23 May 2006)
36. Standing Committee meeting (Moscow, 29 May 2006)
37. European Conference of Presidents and
Visits and meetings

Speakers of Parliaments (Tallinn, 30-31 May 2006)
40. Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Finland’s parliamentary reform of 1906 (Helsinki, 1-2 June 2006)
41. Working visit to Brussels (6-7 June 2006)
42. European People’s Party Summit (Brussels, 15-16 June 2006)
43. Official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia (6-14 July 2006)
44. Working visit to Romania, Moldova and Ukraine (23-30 July 2006)
45. International Conference on “Dialogue of Culture and Interfaith Co-operation” (Nizhniy Novgorod, 7-8 September 2006)
46. Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions (Astana, 12-14 September 2006)
47. Working visit to Turkey (25-28 October 2006)
48. Forum for the Future of Democracy (Moscow, 18-19 October 2006)
49. Working visit to Slovakia (9-10 November 2006)
50. Launch of the campaign against domestic violence (Madrid, 27 November 2006)
51. Official visit to Germany (29 November-1 December 2006)
52. Forum on “the Future of Europe” (European Parliament, Brussels, 4-5 December 2006)

Visits in 2007

53. Working visit to Moscow (10-13 January 2007)
54. Working visit to London (15 January 2007)
55. Meeting with Catherine Colonna, French Minister for Europe (Strasbourg, 16 January 2007)
56. Election of the President of the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 16 January 2007)
57. Working visit to Belarus (Minsk, 18-20 January 2007)
58. 3rd World Congress against the Death Penalty (Paris, 1 February 2007)
59. Conference on the parliamentary dimension of election observation (Strasbourg, 15-16 February 2007)
60. Official visit to Cyprus (18-22 February 2007)
61. European Parliament hearing on “establishing a Community code on visas” (Brussels, 28 February 2007)
62. Working visit to Brussels (8 March 2007)
63. Seminar “What is Europe lacking?” (Florence, 22 March 2007) and ceremony to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (Rome, 23 March 2007)
64. European People’s Party Summit (Berlin, 24-25 March 2007)
65. Award ceremony for the “Premio Mediterraneo Istituzione 2007” of the “Fondazione Mediterraneo” (Naples, 30 March 2007)
66. Meeting with His Eminence Cardinal T. Bertone, State Secretary (Vatican, 2 April 2007)
67. Working visit to Jakarta, Indonesia (27-28 April 2007), and 116th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Denpasar, 29 April-2 May 2007)
68. Participation in the Charlemagne Prize Forum and award ceremony for the prize (Aachen, 16-17 May 2007)
69. Official visit to Ukraine (20-22 May 2007)
70. Official visit to Serbia and participation in the Standing Committee (Belgrade, 23 May 2007)
71. Working visit to Russia (St. Petersburg, Moscow, Vladimir, 29 May-3 June 2007)
72. Opening of the “Model European Parliament” (Brussels, 4 June 2007)
73. Meetings with the Portuguese authorities and representatives of the North-South Centre (Lisbon, 8 June 2007)
74. Working visit to Brussels (11 June 2007)
75. Participation in the 3rd Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy and working visit (Stockholm and Sigtuna, Sweden, 13-14 June 2007)
76. Contribution to the European Conference of the Junior Chamber International (Maastricht, 15 June 2007)
77. Conference on “Christianity, Culture and Moral Values” (Moscow, 19-21 June 2007)
78. Official visit to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (4-10 July 2007)
79. Official visit to France (17 July 2007)
80. Working visit to Russia (24 July-3 August 2007)
81. Visit to the Middle East: Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories (18-24 August 2007)
82. Joint European Parliament Conference of Presidents / PACE Presidential Committee meeting (Brussels, 30 August 2007)
83. Official visit to the Netherlands (3 September 2007)
84. 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly (Sibiu, Romania, 4-7 September 2007)
85. Meetings in Rome, on the occasion of the Bureau meeting (10 September 2007)
86. Official visit to the Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (19-24 September 2007)
87. Conference on “Security of relations: the
Visits and meetings

Netherlands and Russia" (the Hague, 16 October 2007)
88. Working visit to Slovenia (17 October 2007)
89. European People Party (EPP) Statutory Summit (Lisbon, 18 October 2007)
90. Speeches at the Venice Commission plenary meeting (Venice, Italy, 20 October 2007)
91. Medal award ceremony for Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg and speech at the University Robert Schuman (Strasbourg, 25 October 2007)
92. European Day on Migration and Integration: "Migrants: actors and vectors of intercultural dialogue" (Aachen, Germany, 19-20 November 2007)
93. Award ceremony of the “Légion d’Honneur” (the Hague, French Embassy, 20 November 2007)
94. Conference EUROPADAG: "Europe, between ideals and reality" organised by the EPP (Maastricht, 24 November 2007): award of a medal and diploma to Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg
95. Ceremony of signing of the PACE/EP agreement (Brussels, 28 November 2007)
96. Meetings with the Slovak Authorities at the occasion of the Bureau and Standing Committee (Bratislava, 22-23 November 2007)
97. Official visit to Mexico (30 November – 5 December 2007)
98. Working visit to Moscow (19-22 December 2007)
99. Official visit to Turkey (12-17 January 2008)

1. Official visit to Paris (23-24 February 2005)

During the visit I met:
1. Mr Jean-Louis Debré, Speaker of the National Assembly
2. Mr Christian Poncelet, Speaker of the Senate
3. Ms Claudie Haigneré, Minister of State for European Affairs
4. Senator Hubert Haenel, Leader of the Senate delegation to the European Union
5. Mr Pierre Lequiller, Leader of the National Assembly delegation to the European Union
6. Mr Edouard Balladur, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee
7. Ms Pascale Andreani, Adviser to the Prime Minister
8. Mr Jean-Dominique Giuliani, President of the Robert Schuman Foundation
9. Mr Jacques Delors, Founding President of "Our Europe"

Questions addressed:

1. Preparation of the third Council of Europe Summit;
2. How can the work of PACE be better integrated into the proceedings of national parliaments?
3. Relations with the European Union, in particular:
   • The EU should make better use of the experience, institutions and instruments of the Council of Europe;
   • Accession to the European Convention on Human Rights;
   • Accession to conventions that are open to it (eg Convention on Insider Trading, Civil Law Convention on Corruption, European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights, Criminal Law Convention on Corruption);
   • Use of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) instead of setting up similar bodies;
   • As a genuinely pan-European Organisation (800 million citizens, 46 countries), the Council of Europe as an ideal partner for dialogue between member states of the European Union and non-member states;
   • The Council of Europe is a framework for devising and implementing the European Union’s neighbourhood policy.

2. Working visit to Moscow (10-12 March 2005)

I was very warmly received.
All meetings were characterized by a frank exchange of views;
I met with:
1. Mr Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation
2. Mr Lukin, Human Rights Ombudsman
3. Mr Prikhodko, President Putin’s Foreign Affairs Adviser
4. Mr Gryzlov, Chairman of the State Duma
5. Leaders of the Duma Factions
6. Mr Mironov, Chairman of the Council of Federation
7. Representatives of 20 major Russian and international NGOs

Issues discussed:
The Council of Europe Third Summit.

Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union; and between the Council of Europe and the OSCE. There are concerns about increasing interference of the EU into Council of Europe activities. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights is a worrying example. It risks creating new dividing lines in Europe. The Council of Europe is not an instrument of the EU – it is an international organisation on its own. The Summit should also address the division of activities between the Council of Europe and the OSCE, in particular in the field of human rights.

Monitoring – the Russian authorities consider they have fulfilled practically all their obligations and commitments. Pending ones, such as the death penalty, will require more time. The Russian authorities want the Council of Europe to apply a standard and unified interpretation with regard to the rights and obligations of all its member states.

Belarus – it was agreed that isolation is not the way forward. The Russian authorities want PACE to engage in a dialogue with Belarus.

Chechnya – All interlocutors hoped the Round Table that would take place in Strasbourg on 21 March 2005 would bring together the broadest possible spectrum of representatives of the Chechen Republic and the Russian Federal authorities and contribute to finding a peaceful solution.

Meeting with NGOs – There is a feeling among NGO representatives that after parliamentary elections in 2003 in Russia, there has been a setback in political, social and human rights. There are particular concerns about the situation of the freedom of press and media – there are hardly any independent TV channels. Strong control from the government of all press and media. The situation of the press and media is very worrying at regional level.

3. Working visit to Luxembourg (23 March 2005)

At the invitation of the President of the Chamber of Deputies of Luxembourg Lucien Weiler, I gave a speech before the Foreign and European Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Luxembourg, followed by an exchange of views with members of the committee and a press conference.

In my speech, I focused on the Third Summit of the Council of Europe and its decisive role for the future of our organisation.

I regretted certain EU initiatives to create new institutions and structures which risk duplicating work carried out very successfully by Council of Europe structures, with Council of Europe instruments and mechanisms. The European Union should consider the Council of Europe as the primary framework for its “neighbourhood policy”; should sign up to Council of Europe treaties; and make systematic use of the Council’s expertise, experience, institutions and instruments, in particular the European Court of Human Rights, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), the Venice Commission, the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Commission for Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ).

I underlined the increasing role of international parliamentary democracy and the role that PACE, as a unique parliamentary gathering, can play in that context.

Members of the Luxembourg Foreign and European Union Affairs Committee agreed to the need to raise awareness about the risk of duplicating work by international institutions, notably the EU and the Council of Europe. Europe should by no means allow the creation of new dividing lines. They regretted the EU decision to set up the Vienna Agency or the EU policy line with regard to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. The EU and Council of Europe should complement and not duplicate each other’s work.


I took part in a gathering of French parliamentarians in Paris to express support for journalist Florence Aubenas and her guide, Hussein Hanoun al Saadi, held hostage in Iraq, and the three missing Romanian journalists. I expressed the solidarity of our Assembly with the families of the hostages and with the French authorities and parliamentarians, stressing that freedom of the press and freedom of expression were central to the Council of Europe’s mission.
In the afternoon, I made a speech before the Senate Delegation for the European Union. In my intervention, I outlined the Council of Europe’s role, specifying that the third Council of Europe Summit, to be held in Warsaw on 16 and 17 May 2005, should set priorities for its future work. The Summit should reiterate the Council of Europe’s importance for the continent as a whole, define its place in the European institutional landscape, and give the Organisation a precise political mandate for the years ahead. This Third Summit would be an opportunity to issue a call for the unity of a Europe without dividing lines, founded on common values. I stressed that the European Union should make the most of the Council of Europe instruments and experience in defending human rights. With regard to the EU neighbourhood policy I hoped the EU would consider the added value represented by the Council of Europe.

Among others, I underscored two particularly important aspects of the PACE’s work: one was “parliamentary diplomacy”, for which this body is an ideal medium owing to the dual mandate, national and international, of each of its members. The other stems from the fact that the Assembly is a real “school of democracy”, which, among other things, enables parliamentarians from the new European Union member states to familiarise themselves with the day-to-day practice of democracy.

The senators paid tribute to the Council of Europe, which had often played a pioneering role on major issues facing our societies. They welcomed the role played by the Council of Europe in the gradual emergence of a European consciousness. Citing, among other examples, the abolition of capital punishment, the senators noted that, in admitting new members, the Council of Europe had succeeded, thanks to the monitoring procedure, in securing the gradual adoption of high standards in the field of democracy and human rights.

The senators felt that the European Union’s achievements should not obscure the major contribution made by the Council of Europe, which had helped to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights throughout the entire European continent. It was time to formally recognise the institutional role which the European Union could assign to the Council of Europe in this field and to improve the structure of relations between the PACE and the European Parliament.

5. 112th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Manila, 3-8 April 2005)

From 3 to 6 April I took part in the 112th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union held in Manila, Philippines. I used this occasion also to attend the meeting of the Senior Advisory Council of the Association of Asian Parliamentarians for Peace (AAPP), present a statement at the Asian Institute for Management (AIM) and hold a series of bilateral meetings.

112th Assembly of the IPU

On the first day of the conference, I spoke in the general debate on “the impact of domestic and international policies on the situation of women”. In my speech, I concentrated on the Council of Europe’s action with regard to trafficking in human beings, women’s participation in politics and domestic violence against women.

Meeting of the Senior Advisory Council of the Association of Asian Parliamentarians for Peace (AAPP)

On 5 April 2005, I took part in the meeting of the Senior Advisory Council of the Association of Asian Parliamentarians for Peace (AAPP), including Speakers from the Philippines, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Thailand and the Vice-Speaker of the National People’s Congress of China. My address was followed by a lively exchange of views.

AAPP was established in 1999 in Dhaka (Bangladesh) by 26 countries from Asia and the Pacific area as a framework for regional parliamentary co-operation to promote peace and strengthen human rights and democracy. Last year, the AAPP decided to establish an Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) within five years.

The senior Advisory Council was very favourable to building the APA on the model of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and accepted my invitation to visit the Assembly during the June part-session to discuss this matter. The Speaker leading that delegation could address the Assembly on this occasion.

The meeting attracted considerable interest in Asian media.

Statement at the Asian Institute for Management (AIM)
In my statement at the AIM on 2 April 2004, I underlined that the European experience has showed that respect for the principles of pluralistic democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which the Council of Europe stands for, are the pre-conditions for a long-term growth and prosperity. I also insisted on the need for “good government”, which covers not only the absence of corruption but also well-functioning institutions and adequate administrative procedures. My statement was followed by a lively exchange of views with AIM students, as well as with audiences in Djakarta, Jeddah and Colombo via a live video conference link.

Bilateral meetings

The following bilateral meetings deserve to be mentioned in particular:

- Meeting with José de Venecia, Speaker of the Philippine House of Representatives
- Meeting with the delegation of Algeria, led by Amar Saadani, President of the People’s National Assembly
- Meeting with the delegation of Libya, led by Suleiman Al-Shahouni, member of the General People’s Congress, Secretary for Foreign Affairs

6. St Petersburg International Parliamentary Conference dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition in World War II (St Petersburg, 15 April 2005)

From 13 to 16 April I was in St Petersburg heading the PACE delegation to the St Petersburg International Parliamentary Conference dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition in World War II that was co-organised with the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS IPA). On the margins of the conference I had a series of bilateral meetings, as well as a private dinner with the Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, Serguei Mironov.

The conference

I addressed the opening session of the conference and chaired its closing session. The conference was structured around three discussion panels: Panel 1 – Consolidation of democratic forces in combating the danger of fascist revival (Chaired by Abdulkadir Ateş, SOC, Turkey); Panel 2 – Combating international terrorism: ways of interaction (Co-Chaired by Adrian Severin, SOC, Romania) and Panel 3 – The importance of interparliamentary co-operation in responding to future challenges (Co-Chaired by Luc Van den Brande, EPP/CD, Belgium). At the closing session the conference unanimously adopted its Final Declaration.

Bilateral meetings

The following bilateral meetings deserve to be mentioned in particular:

- Meeting with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia Arthur Bagdasaryan
- Meeting with the Speaker of the Senate of Kazakhstan Nurtai Abykaev
- Meeting with the Chairman of the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus Guennadi Novitsky

7. Working visit to Brussels: meetings with Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy, and Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament (Brussels, 19-20 April 2005)

On the 20 April, I met with Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy. In my intervention, I stressed the unique role of our Assembly, whose members have a double mandate, a national and a European one. Many members of the Assembly are also members of COSAC. I drew attention to the preparation of the Third Summit; to the fact that duplication of the Council of Europe’s work by newly-created EU Agencies should be avoided, as well as to the issue of the “disconnection clause”. I expressed our wish and hope that the EU makes public reference to the Council of Europe’s work, notably as regards the Neighbourhood Policy.

Mrs Ferrero-Waldner stressed that she very much appreciated the work of the Council of Europe. At a recent Quadripartite meeting, Mrs Ferrero-Waldner had confirmed that the European Union’s Neighbourhood Policy needed to take the work of the Council of Europe into account. In addition, she spoke of the value of the Council’s work on issues such as Chechnya and Belarus. The Commissioner agreed that complementarity should apply wherever possible. However, according to the
Commissioner, the days when the EU would abstain from certain activities because these were already being carried out in the Council of Europe are over. According to her, the Council of Europe’s core business is clearly human rights and the rule of law.

Pending ratification of the EU Constitutional Treaty, preparatory work for the accession by the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights should already start. She promised to look into the question of the “disconnection clause” which clearly carried political implications. She agreed that the EU Human Rights Agency would be the institution to cover information and provide analysis, and should not just duplicate the work of the Council of Europe. She considered it useful for the Council of Europe to be represented on the Board of the Agency.

In my meeting with Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament, I focused on the Third Summit and what it expects from the European Union, in particular regarding the EU Neighbourhood Policy, the mandate of the European Agency of Fundamental Rights and better use of the expertise of Council of Europe mechanisms and instruments. I underlined the fact that there are many opportunities for cooperation between PACE and the European Parliament, social cohesion and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue among others.

President Borrell shared the view that intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is becoming increasingly important and that the two institutions should work together. The European Agency for Fundamental Rights appears to be a Commission initiative only. The European Parliament has not been consulted.

I also discussed with President Borrell relations and co-operation between our two institutions, notably the Quadripartite meetings and meetings between the PACE Presidential Committee and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament. I explained that the current format of 2+2 does not allow for PACE and the European Parliament to be associated with the meeting. Most items discussed are the subject of recommendations by our Assembly, therefore we have recommended that the Third Summit propose the inclusion of the PACE and the European Parliament in the Quadripartite meetings. In addition, I proposed regular meetings between the PACE Presidential Committee and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament.

President Borrell shared the view that it is important for the two parliamentary institutions to be represented at quadripartite meetings. He will discuss with the European Parliament Conference of Presidents my proposal for a more institutionalised form of co-operation between the two bodies.

We also discussed Election Observation Missions and agreed that the two institutions have established very good co-operation in this area. Future co-operation should build on the basis of such good practices.

We also discussed co-operation at committee level and stressed the need for better co-ordination in the future, in particular with regard to exchange of rapporteurs, reference to work carried out in the committees of respective parliaments, exchange of information and invitation and participation in meetings, fact-finding missions, conferences and other events. I brought a number of specific items to be followed up in the future to his attention, in particular:

- A request for official observer status of PACE in the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA);
- An official proposal regarding the modalities of the participation of PACE and the European Parliament in the quadripartite meetings.

8. Official visit to Rome (3-4 May 2005)

I visited Rome on 4 May. The meetings took place in a very constructive and cordial atmosphere. Italian interlocutors expressed their strong support for the Third Summit of the Council of Europe and for the role of PACE.

During the visit, I met with and was officially welcomed in the Italian Senate by the Speaker, Senator Pera. The programme of the visit included meetings with: Pier Ferdinando Casini, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Lamberto Dini, Deputy Speaker of the Senate, Gustavo Selva, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Chamber of Deputies, Gianfranco Fini, Foreign Minister, Rocco Buttiglione, Minister for Cultural Heritage, Mario Greco, Chair of the Senate Committee on EU Policy, Fiorello Provera, Chair of the Senate’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Father Ghirlanda, Chancellor of the Gregorian University.
Our discussions focused on:

Third Summit of the Council of Europe

I outlined the objectives of the Third Summit and stressed the need to give the Council of Europe a clear mandate for the years to come and the means to implement the action plan that will come out of the Summit.

The Council of Europe and the European Union

I expressed concern about certain initiatives of the EU Commission, which the Assembly felt are creating parallel institutions that would duplicate work carried out by the Council of Europe, such as the EU decision to set up a number of EU Agencies where other international institutions or organisations have no right to participate, the geographical remit of the EU Agency of Fundamental Rights and the implementation of the EU Neighbourhood Policy.

Italian interlocutors agreed that the Council of Europe should stick to its core business and the EU should make better and more efficient use of the Council of Europe’s mechanisms and experience.

Council of Europe and Russia

I underlined the importance of keeping Russia involved and engaged. PACE continues to monitor the compliance of Russia with the obligations it undertook when it became a member of the Council of Europe.

All Italian interlocutors agreed with the PACE approach to keep Russia engaged and encouraged the continuation of the dialogue initiated by the Council of Europe-PACE Round Table on Chechnya.

Council of Europe and PACE work and activities

I highlighted the role of PACE in promoting the core values of the Council of Europe and the increasing importance of parliamentary diplomacy. I stressed that the Assembly has increasingly become a forum par excellence for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, where the entire continent’s cultures and religions are represented, meet on a regular basis, engage in constructive dialogue and work together to strengthen and advance our common values.

Press

On Tuesday 4 May 2005, I had a working lunch with 18 Italian journalists from the whole spectrum of Italian press. Rai TV broadcast three live interviews and there was broad press coverage of my visit and meetings in Italy.


During this meeting, I concentrated on the following main questions:

EU Fundamental Rights Agency, in particular with regard to the geographical remit of the Agency and the Council of Europe’s association with the Agency

I expressed concerns with regard to the idea of enlarging the Agency’s mandate beyond the EU frontiers. This would lead to duplication, double-standards and waste of money. I stressed that if the EU has specific requirements towards EU non-member countries in the Council of Europe’s field of action, they should be discussed with the Council of Europe and joint programmes could be set up to this effect.

Mr Frattini said that the possibility of enlarging the Agency’s competencies to the countries in the European Union neighbourhood was under consideration. However, he agreed that whatever the mandate of the Agency, duplications with the Council of Europe’s activities should be avoided. He considered that the recommendations of the Assembly’s recent report on the Fundamental Rights Agency (adopted on 18 March by the Standing Committee) were very useful and should be followed.

Accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights and other Conventions

Mr Frattini also said that a draft inter-institutional agreement, now in preparation, was excluding the participation of external institutions in all European Union Agencies. However, he considered that exceptions should be possible to this rule and was strongly in favour of the Council of Europe’s involvement with the Agency.
Mr Frattini said that the EU was preparing for its accession to the European Convention on Human Rights. However, there were still some EU countries that considered that the entry into force of the European Constitutional Treaty should not be anticipated and, therefore, these preparations should have a rather informal character.

Furthermore, we discussed questions related to the Third Summit, in particular as regards the relations between the European Union and Council of Europe, and the increasing role of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

10. Third Summit of the Council of Europe (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005)

I took part in the Third Summit, together with the Presidential Committee, Konstantin Kosachev, rapporteur on the Third Summit, and the Secretary General of the Assembly.

I spoke at the opening of the Summit during the 1st working session on “European Unity: European values” and during the 3rd working session on “European Architecture”.

I held bilateral meetings with Presidents of Azerbaijan, Finland and Romania, Prime Ministers of Liechtenstein and Turkey, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece. I also had a number of informal meetings and I gave a series of interviews.

I was very pleased that the Bureau of the Committee of Ministers accepted my proposal for a meeting between the Presidential Committee and the Bureau of the Committee of Ministers. This meeting, which took place on Tuesday 17 May, was very useful and interesting. As a concrete result of this meeting, the President of Poland made the proposal to ask Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, to draw up a report on the relationship between the European Union and the Council of Europe.

11. Intervention at the Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 2 June 2005)

On 2 June, I delivered a speech at the Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, on the “Third Summit and Priorities of the Council of Europe”.

12. Working visit to UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) Headquarters (Nyon, 3 June 2005)

On the 3 June 2005, I visited UEFA at the House of European Football in Nyon, Switzerland. My interlocutors and I see ample opportunities where the two organisations can contribute to each others’ activities.

I met with:

1. Lennart Johansson, UEFA President
2. Lars-Christer Olsson, UEFA Chief Executive
3. Mathieu Sprengers, UEFA Treasurer
4. William Gaillard, Director of Communications

We discussed the following issues:

• General co-operation with UEFA
• Ethics in sport
• The fight against racism in sport
• Sport as a tool to promote intercultural dialogue
• A European prize for sport

I focused on the core activities of the Council of Europe and PACE: human rights, the rule of law, democracy, diversity and social cohesion. Culture and sport are very efficient tools to promote peace, tolerance and diversity.

Areas where Council of Europe/PACE and UEFA could work together include promoting good governance and ethics in sport, fighting racism and promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. I invited UEFA to join the Council of Europe campaign against racism, anti-Semitism, islamophobia and discrimination that will be launched in 2006.

13. Meeting with Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), (Brussels, 13 June 2005)

This meeting was held in view of the forthcoming visit of Mr de Hoop Scheffer to the Assembly on 23 June 2005. The following main issues were discussed, which were likely to be raised during the exchange of views with Assembly members in Strasbourg:

• possibilities for co-operation between the
Council of Europe and NATO in specific regions, in particular the South Caucasus, the Republics of Central Asia, Ukraine and Moldova;

• access by the CPT (European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment) to prisons in Kosovo;

• use by NATO of Assembly reports, especially those on monitoring;

• need to bring to justice war criminals in ex-Yugoslavia;

• visit by the President of the Assembly to Washington in September 2005.

14. Meeting with José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission (Brussels, 13 June 2005)

I raised the following main issues during this meeting:

• the importance of the conclusions of the Third Summit of the Council of Europe for relations between the European Union and the Council of Europe;

• the role of the Council of Europe in strengthening European unity, especially in the context of the difficulties following the referenda in France and the Netherlands. I stressed that the Assembly can substantially help in this respect, given that its members have a double mandate, European and national;

• the new neighbourhood policy of the EU, in particular the need to avoid duplication and waste of money in the respective activities of both institutions and to make full use of the Council of Europe’s instruments and mechanisms;

• the mandate of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, in particular the geographical remit of the Agency and the participation of the Council of Europe in the Agency’s management board;

• the report by Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, on the relationship between the Council of Europe and the European Union;

• the need to ensure a common legal space in Europe;

• increasing the role of parliamentary bodies in EU/Council of Europe co-operation and the need to ensure the participation of the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly and of the European Parliament in the Quadripartite meetings between the EU and the Council of Europe.

Mr Barroso was very open and constructive. He stressed that the Council of Europe was an important partner for the EU and that the European Commission was ready to work very constructively with the Council of Europe.

The two institutions should use their comparative advantages – the EU being more integrated, the Council of Europe being larger.

He appreciated very much the positions of principle taken by the Council of Europe on many difficult issues.

Last but not least, he stressed that the two institutions shared not only common goals, but also a common flag, which was originally the Council of Europe’s flag.

On specific issues, Mr Barroso said:

• with regard to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, this idea was supported by the European Parliament strongly in a recent report, including the enlargement of the geographical remit to EU non-members states. The Agency is necessary for the EU, which must strengthen its human rights dimension in order not to be seen as a “free-market tool”. However, it would be a complete mistake to waste money and duplicate activities. Therefore, he would be in favour of an agreement between the Agency and the Council of Europe to fix modalities of co-operation. He would carefully consider the question of the geographical remit.

• with regard to the new neighbourhood policy, it was becoming even more important now when the further enlargement of the European Union was being questioned by some. The European Commission will use the instruments and mechanisms of the Council of Europe, including monitoring reports. He agreed that it was important to give more public credit to the Council of Europe for its work. Both institutions should support each other publicly.

• with regard to the report of Mr Juncker, he would be in touch with Mr Juncker on this important matter;
Visits and meetings

• with regard to the participation of the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly and of the European Parliament in the Quadripartite meetings between the EU and the Council of Europe, he was in favour, subject to the agreement of all parties concerned.

15. Meeting with Bureau of the “Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie” (Brussels, 4 July 2005)

On the 4 of July, I met with the Bureau of the “Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie” in Brussels. I spoke on the work of the Assembly and the Council of Europe in the field of cultural policy, in particular its activities to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and to protect minority languages.

I also focused on the need to promote teaching of several languages at an early stage of education in order to respond to changes and developments in Europe. In this context I mentioned work carried out by the Council of Europe, in particular the European Portfolio of Languages.

16. Visit of the Presidential Committee to Ukraine (5-8 July 2005)

I visited Ukraine together with the Presidential Committee in order to give support for democratic reforms in this country during this crucial period following the change of the “regime” at the end of the last year and before the very important parliamentary elections to be held at the beginning of the next year. This visit was also a response to the appeal for assistance launched by Viktor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine, during his address before the Assembly in January 2005.

During the visit, the delegation met Mr Yushchenko, President of Ukraine, Mr Lytvyn, Speaker of Parliament, Mrs Tymoshenko, Prime Minister, Mr Tarasyuk, Foreign Minister of Ukraine, representatives of the political groups in the Ukrainian Parliament, members of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Parliament, members of the parliamentary delegation to PACE, Mr Yanukovych, leader of the party “Regions of Ukraine” (opposition), Mr Medvedchuk, leader of the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United) (opposition) and NGO representatives. We also met Ambassador Boag, Head of the Delegation of the European Commission to Ukraine, and Mr Tchong, First Secretary of the Dutch Embassy in Kyiv. We also visited the museum dedicated to the “Chernobyl” nuclear disaster. I gave a large number of interviews, including on the two main TV channels.

In my speech as well as during our bilateral meetings, I raised the main following issues:

• Monitoring
• Ratification of the Council of Europe Conventions
• Parliamentary elections in 2006
• Constitutional reform
• Independence of the judiciary
• Role of the opposition
• Fight against corruption
• Inadmissibility of “double mandates” in the Parliament and the government
• Relations with the EU and Russia
• Transnistrian conflict
• Village of Velke Slemence (Slovakia) / Mali Selmenci (Ukraine)

17. Official visits to Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan (18-23 August 2005)

Between 18 and 23 August, I conducted official visits to the three countries of the South Caucasus, namely Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

I arrived in Armenia at a crucial time in its constitutional reform process, with parliament due to meet in extraordinary session on 29 August in order to adopt amendments which would be put to a referendum in November. I pursued the main points of Resolution 1458, adopted by the Assembly in June, with all those I met, including NGO and media representatives, government and opposition parliamentarians, the ministers for justice and external affairs, the President of the Parliament and President Kocharyan, as well as the Catholicos of All Armenians. Most importantly, I stressed that reform of the constitution was a necessary precondition to Armenia’s fulfilment of its obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe.

On the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, everyone I met agreed that the current situation, in particular the blockades by Turkey and Azerbaijan, was very damaging to Armenia. I consistently argued that the prospects for stability and prosperity of the entire region depended on a peaceful settlement to the conflict, and that the past should not
be an obstacle to the future of the young generation. I encouraged use of the opportunities for parliamentary diplomacy open to the Armenian and Azerbaijani delegations to PACE, and was pleased to learn of the widespread, albeit cautious, optimism over the ongoing bilateral diplomacy between the two presidents.

My visit to Georgia was of slightly shorter duration, involving meetings with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, members of the parliamentary opposition and representatives of civil society, as well as the Patriarch of All-Georgia. I applauded the considerable progress made by the authorities since the “Rose Revolution” and welcomed the apparent recovery in the momentum of reform achieved in recent months. Nevertheless, I stressed that the Assembly’s deadlines for meeting obligations and commitments towards the Council of Europe would not be extended any further.

On foreign policy matters, the government expressed deep disappointment in the failure by Russia to respond to President Saakashvili’s proposals made in the PACE in January. The situation in South Ossetia was seen to be deteriorating, with the Prime Minister claiming that Russian involvement was increasingly overt, for example through the appointment of a Russian Prime Minister from Siberia and a Russian Defence Minister also originating from outside South Ossetia. On the other hand, there was general satisfaction with the agreement on withdrawal of the Russian military bases. I also raised the wider issue of the EU’s New Neighbourhood Policy. In this connection, the Prime Minister expressed some frustration with the progress made in developing trilateral relations, or even simultaneous bilateral co-operation on issues of common interest, between Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, although he hoped that this situation might improve once the Azerbaijani elections were over.

In Azerbaijan I discussed primarily the forthcoming parliamentary elections, in the context of the overall political climate, and the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh with civil society and media representatives, government and opposition politicians, the ministers of foreign and internal affairs, the prime minister, the Chairman of the Milli Mejlis and the President. I also met Sheikh ul-Islam Haji Allahshukur Pashazade, Head of the Board of Caucasian Muslims, along with leaders of the Jewish and Orthodox religious communities.

Given the proximity of the elections and the detailed recommendations made by the Assembly in Resolution 1456, adopted in June, my discussions in Baku were technically detailed.

I repeatedly emphasised the following issues:

- investigation of electoral fraud committed in 2003;
- media freedom and pluralism; freedom of assembly;
- restoration of the candidacy rights of freed political prisoners;
- the timely introduction of new-style ID cards; allowing foreign-funded NGOs to monitor the elections; marking voters’ fingers with indelible ink to prevent multiple voting; investigation of the murder of Elmar Huseynov;
- and the problem of political prisoners.

Whilst I was convinced that many on the government side – including, in particular, President Aliyev, whose May decree amounted to a clear statement of intent – were genuinely interested in ensuring that the elections would be free and fair, there was not unanimity on all points of detail, and I was left with the impression that, for some, their commitment may be greater in principle than in practice.

The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh clearly remained extremely sensitive in Azerbaijan. Almost everyone I met considered that Armenia, as the aggressor and illegally occupying power, should withdraw its forces before negotiations could take place. Nevertheless, everyone agreed that the conflict was an obstacle to regional stability and prosperity, and I again urged all parties to make every effort to find a peaceful settlement. President Aliyev was cautiously optimistic about the prospects of bilateral presidential diplomacy, although he felt that his contacts with President Kocharyan in other settings had not always been so productive. As in Armenia, I stated my willingness to facilitate the opportunities for parliamentary diplomacy open to the two countries’ delegations to PACE.

Overall, my visits came at important stages in the countries’ democratic development: for Armenia, in relation to the constitutional reform process; for Georgia, in relation to its deadlines for honouring obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe; and for Azerbaijan, in relation to the November elections. The Assembly’s reports and resolutions were well known and appreciated in all three countries, as
Visits and meetings

was the work of the Venice Commission, and the fact that I was accompanied by the Head of Secretariat of the Monitoring Committee usefully reinforced the political importance that the Assembly attaches to its monitoring procedure.

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to the respective delegations for their assistance in organising my visits and my thanks to all those I met for the invaluable information and insights they provided.


The main objective of the visit to Washington was to discuss with the US authorities ways of promoting democracy and human rights in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, the situation in Belarus, the possible use of Council of Europe expertise in Iraq and the fight against terrorism – including the need to adhere to international human rights and humanitarian law.

With Mr Alcee L. Hastings, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and US Congressman, we discussed co-operation between the two Assemblies, in particular as regards the observation of elections.

In the US State Department, I met with Glyn Davies, the Acting Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, and Ambassador Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs. Discussions centred on US policy, as well as the situation in Belarus and in the southern Caucasus. I used this occasion to invite the US Secretary of State, Mrs Condoleezza Rice, to address the Assembly.

I also met John Bruton, the EU Commission’s Ambassador to the United States and former Prime Minister of Ireland, as well as representatives of the following human rights NGOs: Open Society Institute, Amnesty International USA, Human Rights First and Human Rights Leadership Coalition.

In New York, I addressed the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments. In my speech, I stressed the need for an increased involvement of parliamentarians in international relations and the importance of parliamentary diplomacy. I underlined that the Parliamentary Assembly, which has been the engine of the Council of Europe and has become a real school of democracy, is now looked at as a source of inspiration for other international assemblies, such as the Pan-African Parliament and the future Asian Parliamentary Assembly.

I held a series of bilateral meetings with Presidents of Parliament attending the conference to discuss relations between these Parliaments and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In this connection I met with:

1. Mr Baghdasaryan, Speaker of the National Assembly of Armenia
2. Mr Aleskarov, Chairman of the Milli Mejlis of Azerbaijan
3. Mrs Burjanadze, Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia
4. Mr Wanger, President of the Landtag of Liechtenstein
5. Mrs Ergma, Speaker of the Estonian Parliament
6. Mr Gryzlov, Chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation
7. Mr Mukhamejanov, Chairman of the Assembly of Kazakhstan (Mazhilis)
8. Mr Konoplev, Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarus
9. Mr Dos Santos, Vice-President of the European Parliament

With Mrs Louise Fréchette, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations, I discussed, in particular, the involvement of parliamentarians in the work of international organisations. In this connection, I invited Mr Eliasson, elected President of the 60th session of the UN General Assembly, to address the Parliamentary Assembly during its January part-session (23-27 January 2006) in the framework of the debate on “parliamentary dimension of the United Nations” (Rapporteur: Mrs de Zulueta, Italy).

On the invitation of Mr de Venecia, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines, on behalf of the Senior Advisory Council of the "Association of Asian Parliamentarians for Peace" (AAPP), I presented to the AAPP proposals for a "road map" for the establishment of an Asian Parliamentary Assembly. This meeting was attended by Mr Norodom Ranariddh, President of the National Assembly of Cambodia, Mr Bhalakula, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Thailand, Mr Sheng Huaren, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of China, as well as by Mr Jean Ping, President of the 59th session of the UN General Assembly, and Mr Casini, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Italy.

I visited London between Sunday 9 October and Tuesday 11 October. During my visit I met Ian Pearson MP, Foreign Office minister; Michael Martin MP, the Speaker of the House of Commons; the Joint Committee on Human Rights; Lord Brown, chair of Sub-Committee E of the House of Lords European Union Committee; Sir Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality; Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International; Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain; and Silvia Casale, President of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. The main themes of our discussions were (i) the UK government’s anti-terrorism proposals; (ii) intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, including the fight against extremism and the Assembly report on European Muslim communities confronted with extremism; and (iii) the EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

In my meeting with Mr Pearson, I emphasised the Assembly’s expectation that all the UK’s anti-terrorism measures must respect its human rights obligations, in particular under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Both the Muslim Council of Britain and the Commission for Racial Equality agreed with the need to enhance intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, and appreciated the Assembly’s attention to the issue. Whilst both bodies welcomed the possibility of enhancing co-operation with the Assembly, the Muslim Council of Britain expressed slight reservations towards the forthcoming report, pointing out that not only Muslim communities were affected by extremism. Nevertheless, the outcome of both meetings was highly positive: I invited both organisations to send any further information to my private office, on the understanding that additional future contacts could be established directly with committees.

I discussed the Fundamental Rights Agency primarily with Mr Pearson, Lord Brown (whose House of Lords sub-committee was responsible for scrutinising the Commission’s proposals) and with the JCHR. Whilst all were broadly sympathetic to the Assembly’s concerns, the JCHR, in the person of Lord Lester of Herne Hill, added that the Council of Europe would be in a stronger position to oppose an extensive Agency if it first put its own house in order, notably with respect to the effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights.

Finally, the CPT President and I considered ways in which the Assembly and the CPT could reinforce co-operation, along with issues such as improving the Assembly’s procedures in relation to appointment of CPT members. Mrs Casale was very appreciative of the meeting, the first between Presidents of the CPT and PACE.

20. Joint meeting between the Presidential Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament (Brussels, 20 October 2005)


The following issues were discussed:

The Council of Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union

The PACE participants stated that assistance and monitoring of the democratisation process in Council of Europe member states covered by the EU Neighbourhood Policy was already being undertaken by the Council of Europe. There was no need for new institutional procedures at EU level in the same field, which would create a risk of double standards and lead to waste of money. For the same reason, there was a clear need for more joint co-operation programmes.

The European Parliament participants considered that the EU and the Council of Europe were complementary, with the latter offering expertise in matters such as human rights, social cohesion and democratic stability. Some issues were dealt with by the Council of Europe in ways that would be impossible for the EU, particularly given that European countries covered by the Neighbourhood Policy are Council of Europe members. Nevertheless, the EU should not rely only on one source for its information. Furthermore, it was inevitable that there would be some overlap; the issue was how this could be managed.

In conclusion, both sides agreed that co-operation between the two organisations, including joint programmes, should be enhanced, in recognition of the Council of Europe’s expertise and instruments.
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The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

The PACE participants noted that if the Agency had a mandate extending beyond the borders of the EU, it would duplicate activities of the Council of Europe, in particular as regards monitoring procedures. This could undermine the existing developed and effective mechanisms of the Council of Europe.

The European Parliament participants discounted fears that the Agency would have adverse consequences for the future of the Council of Europe. Practical measures were needed to ensure that these fears did not become reality. Some of them said clearly that the Agency should not be able to report on non-EU member states and that it would not monitor human rights outside the EU. Instead, it should be limited to the territory of the EU, where it would act like a national human rights institution, in accordance with the Paris Principles.

Whilst perceptions differed as to the extent of any possible threat posed by the Agency to the Council of Europe, there was a consensus on the need for effective provisions to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Participation of PACE and the European Parliament in the Quadripartite meetings between the Council of Europe and the EU

It was agreed that the two assemblies should participate in the Quadripartite Council of Europe-EU meetings, and that a joint letter should be written requesting the introduction of a parliamentary dimension to the meetings.

Co-operation between PACE and European Parliament committees

Participants endorsed, as an initial concrete step, the proposal that pairs of counterpart committees should identify one issue to form the basis of joint activity, made during an earlier meeting between the Chairman of the European Parliament Conference of Committee Chairmen and the chairpersons of PACE committees.

In addition, European Parliament committees should institute a practice of inviting PACE rapporteurs to their meetings, to participate in the same way as other experts. The Neighbourhood Policy was a particularly important area for cooperation, especially with rapporteurs of the PACE Monitoring Committee.

Report by Mr Juncker on relations between the Council of Europe and the EU

Participants agreed that both assemblies should support Mr Juncker and encourage him to produce a visionary, political document.

Belarus

Participants agreed to consider setting up a Troika on Belarus, together with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Election observation

Participants agreed to continue jointly observing elections.

PACE observer status with the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly

EP participants supported the proposal that PACE have observer status with the Euro-Mediterranean Assembly.


At the invitation of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, I made a speech at the Round Table which was followed by a discussion. On this occasion, I proposed that the European Union's unspent resources in the field of democracy and human rights should be pooled in a joint European Union/Council of Europe fund to finance joint programmes intended for the development and consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe. I suggested to Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, to take this proposal into consideration in the preparation of his report on the relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

22. Official visit to Albania (23-26 October 2005)

At the invitation of the Speaker of Albanian Parliament Mrs Topalli, I visited Albania from 23-26 October 2005. During my visit I met with the Speaker of Parliament, the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Committee on EU Integration. I also delivered a speech before the Parliament. In addition, I had meetings with the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of European Integration, the
Minister of Education, the Mayor of Tirana and Chairman of the Socialist Party, the OSCE Head of Presence and the Ombudsman. I also met with NGOs and had an exchange of views with students at the Faculty of Law. The main themes of our discussions were:

- The fight against corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings;
- Reform of the electoral process;
- Reform of state administration, media and press;
- The need to strengthen the judiciary and ensure its independence;
- Co-operation between the main political players in Albania;
- Integration of Albania into Euro-Atlantic structures;
- Future status of Kosovo;
- Follow up to the Third Summit of the Council of Europe;
- Co-operation between Council of Europe, PACE and Albania.

In all meetings, I urged Albanian interlocutors to fulfil and honour the commitments and obligations towards the Council of Europe. I emphasised the need for the government, political parties and the judiciary to take strong action to fight corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings and continue the process of electoral reform.

I also discussed the need to strengthen the judiciary and ensure its independence. Whilst sympathetic to their concerns at the slow pace prosecutor’s offices around the country were acting on allegations of corruption brought before them, I insisted on the need to act according to the law and encouraged Albanian interlocutors to ask the opinion of the Venice Commission on both issues.

In my discussions I emphasised the importance of co-operation across the spectrum of Albanian politics, in particular on issues of national concern such as integration into European Union and Atlantic structures, reform of the electoral process, the fight against corruption, organised crime and trafficking in human beings. I urged the governing majority to seek always the consensus of the opposition. I also urged the opposition and its new leader to be constructive on issues of national interest.

Finally, we discussed co-operation between Albania, the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly. Council of Europe/PACE input would be welcome in internal administrative reform of the parliament (limiting the immunity of parliamentarians and curbing expenses), electoral reform, reform of the High Council of Justice, review of the law on the career of judges, reorganisation of first instance courts, revision of the law that regulates the functioning of the Prosecutor General’s Office, liberalisation of higher education and the provision of internet links to all schools (including those in the rural areas).

**23. Launch of the Forum for Democracy**

(Warsaw, 3 November 2005)

On Thursday 3 and Friday 4 November 2005 I attended the Launching Meeting of the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Warsaw, organised by the Polish government with the theme of “civic participation”.

In my speech, I reminded participants that democracy relied on real freedoms and enthusiastic, effective participation. Otherwise, a gap emerged between politicians – who ceased to exercise leadership – and the electorate, resulting in a lack of credibility for the political process. As to the future of the Forum, I suggested that it should become diverse and representative, a bridge between different groups in society; autonomous and pro-active; and flexible and creative.

The launch meeting was, in my opinion, a good beginning. For the future, however, there is a need to encourage spontaneity and creativity. The Forum needs a more varied composition, with greater representation of grass-roots non-governmental organisations, media and political parties. A “bottom-up” rather than a “top-down” approach is preferable, driven by civil society within a space made available by governments, whose representatives would be invited to participate in response to civil society initiatives, rather than vice versa.

The Forum Chairman invited participants to initiate a review paper on the state of civic participation in Europe, which would examine and compare the experience of different Council of Europe member states and develop proposals such as a Code of Good Practice for civic participation. I in turn would invite the Political Affairs Committee, through its Sub-committee, to contribute to this work, perhaps through the preparation of a report.
Visits and meetings

Whilst in Warsaw, I met Marek Jurek, new speaker of the Sejm, and Bogdan Borusewicz, new speaker of the Senate. Our discussions focussed on Belarus, the EU situation (including the Constitutional Treaty, which the speakers considered to be unpopular amongst Polish citizens, and Turkish accession, which Poland supported), Poland’s relations with its neighbours (including the issue of Russia’s chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers) and co-operation between the Assembly and the Polish parliament (including the possibility of parliamentary debates on the activities of the Council of Europe).

I also attended a dinner hosted by the Dutch Ambassador, at which Senator Edmund Wittbrodt, Piotr Nowina-Kopnopka, President of the Schuman Foundation Warsaw, Dr Rosa Thun, head of the European Commission delegation and Pawel Swieboda, Director of the Department of the European Union and Accession Negotiations of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, amongst others, were present.

24. Official visit to Turkey (9-13 November 2005)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, Bülent Arınç, I visited Turkey (Ankara and Istanbul) from 9 to 13 November 2005.

In Ankara I met, in particular, the Speaker, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah Gül, members of the EU Harmonisation Committee of the Parliament, the Chairman of the Republican People’s Party Deniz Baykal, the Chairman of the Motherland Party Erkan Mumcu, the President of Religious Affairs Ali Bardakoglu, and NGO representatives (from the Human Rights Association of Turkey Yakuz Önen, and from the “Flying Broom” women’s association Halime Güner).

In Istanbul, I met, in particular, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartolomeos, Chief Rabbi Ishak Haleva, the Director General of the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference), Halit Eren, the Chairman of the Board of the Association of the Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (TÜSİAD), Ömer Sabanci and the Dean of Koc University, Atilla Askar.

I addressed the Grand National Assembly on 9 November as the first foreign guest this year.

In my speech, I raised, in particular, the following issues, which I further developed during my bilateral meetings:

- the major political and legislative reforms accomplished by Turkey;
- the process of accession to the European Union, stressing that promises must be kept by the EU in order to dismiss any suspicion of double standards vis-à-vis Turkey and proposing to develop a co-ordinated strategic plan for a dialogue involving both the EU and Turkey to overcome misunderstandings and prejudices;
- the key role to be played by Turkey in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;
- the integration of Turkish communities living in Western Europe, stressing the need for an enhanced participation in public and private life and warning about the dangers resulting from a loss of trust in society and the lack of perspectives;
- the danger of creating a link between religion and social problems caused by exclusion, unemployment and a lack of education;
- the need for further progress on the twelve points identified by the Assembly at the closing of the monitoring procedure;
- the inadmissibility of the judicial procedure against the author Orhan Pamuk;
- the need to strictly respect religious freedom, calling for a complete separation between the State and religion, and underlining that freedom of religion and its unrestricted practice must be guaranteed by the state and all obstacles to the full enjoyment of this essential right must be lifted;
- the need to strictly respect the rights of religious minorities, including their property rights, and the rights of minorities in general;
- the need to implement reforms ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women, including political rights;
- the fight against corruption, recalling that immunity does not mean impunity;
- the role of Turkey as a major actor and factor for stability in highly important geopolitical issues such as the South Caucasus, in particular the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Iraq, the Middle East and Central Asia;
the role of Turkey in the efforts to find a solution to the Cyprus issue, stressing that the international community should be more open and constructive with the Turkish Cypriot community and noting that the recognition of the state of Cyprus is a necessary part of the process of Turkey's accession to the EU.

During the visit, I made the following proposals:

- to fully develop the Council of Europe as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. This idea received wide support during my meetings, including from the Speaker of Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the religious leaders;

- to involve the Council of Europe in the UN initiative on the “Alliance of Civilisations” co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey. I suggested that one of the next meetings in this framework should take place in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg;

- to intensify the Council of Europe's contribution to the integration of migrants communities living in Western Europe by developing mutual understanding and improving both the image of migrants and their countries of origin. With respect to Turkish migrants, a “Turkish Centre” could be set up in one of the Council of Europe member states concerned. This idea was warmly welcomed by my interlocutors. TÜSİAD (the Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen) also expressed its interest in supporting such a project;

- to set up an ‘Observatory on urban violence’, which has already been proposed by the Assembly in order to make best use of national practices;

- concerning the Cyprus issue, I called for a new initiative to make further steps towards a final settlement and invited the EU to honour promises made after the referendum last year. In this connection, I noted the Prime Minister’s proposal to invite Mr Talat to an Assembly part-session;

- on the tragic events of 1915, I insisted that history must not be allowed to obstruct the future and encouraged my interlocutors to approach this matter in a spirit of openness. I noted the offer of the Prime Minister, supported by the Parliament, to set up a joint committee, open to all interested parties, to establish the truth on these events and the willingness of Turkey to open its archives;

- on torture, I called for zero tolerance and stressed the necessity to prosecute not only the perpetrators, but also their superiors;

- I invited Patriarch Bartolomeos to address the Parliamentary Assembly during one of its forthcoming part-sessions (on the basis of a previous Bureau decision), and he accepted this invitation;

- on the parliamentary election in Azerbaijan, I stressed that the Assembly will discuss the report of its Ad Hoc Committee in Bucharest on 25 November. I noted that Turkey, despite shortcomings noticed by observers, considers that this election has marked progress;

- on Nagorno-Karabakh, I underlined the availability of the Assembly to contribute to the settlement of the conflict, which is hampering the future of the South Caucasian region.

25. 115th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 16-17 November 2005)

On 16 November, I took part in the “fireside chat” organised by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, with the participation of Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg. I also spoke at the Ceremony to mark the 50th Anniversary of the European flag.

On 17 November, I made a statement before the Committee of Ministers.

On the occasion of the session, I met, in particular:

1. Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg;
2. Mr Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania;
3. Mr Besnik Mustafaj, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Albania;
4. Mr Borys Tarasyuk, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine;
5. Mr Vartan Oskanian, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia;
6. Mr Vuk Draskovic, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro;
7. Mr Elmar Brok, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament.
Visits and meetings


I visited Romania from 23 to 24 November 2005.

I met (in chronological order):

1. Mr Dan Mircea Geoana, President of the Social-Democrat Party
2. Members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Romanian Parliament
3. Mr Corneliu Vadim Tudor, president of the “Greater Romania” Party
4. Mr Puiu Hasotti – National Liberal Party
5. Mr Radu-Mircea Bercanu – Democratic Party
6. Mr Verestoy Attila – Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania
7. Mr Dan Voiculescu – Conservative Party
8. Mr Nicolae Vacaroiu, President of the Senate
9. Mr Adrian Nastase, President of the Chamber of Deputies
10. His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church
11. His Excellency Mr Traian Băsescu, President of Romania
12. Mr Calin Popescu-Tariceanu, Prime Minister of Romania

I also had an exchange of views with representatives of the main churches in Romania and representatives of democracy and human rights NGOs.

I addressed the National Assembly of Romania on 24 November.

In my speech, I raised, in particular, the following issues, which I further developed during my bilateral meetings:

- Political situation in Romania and the prospects of joining the EU in 2007;
- Priorities of the Romanian Chair and co-operation with PACE, in particular:
  - the negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union;
  - promotion of democratic reforms in the region;
  - promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;
- Co-operation with the upcoming Russian Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe;
- Strengthening the functioning and independence of the judiciary;
- Public administration reform;
- Fight against corruption and trafficking in human beings;
- Integration of Roma;
- Allegations on CIA detention centres in Romania;
- Romania’s contribution to peace and stability in the region in particular Transnistria, Kosovo and other Balkan countries;
- Co-operation between the different political parties;
- Co-operation with civil society

During the visit, I made the following proposals:

1. To the parliament of Romania:
   - to launch an investigation into allegations about CIA detention centres in Romania and fully co-operate with the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly and other international bodies in their investigations;
   - to organise once a year a debate in the parliament regarding developments and relations with the Council of Europe and the European Union;

2. To the parliament and Romanian authorities:
   - to involve the Council of Europe in the process of democratisation of Transnistria, in particular participation of the Council of Europe in the negotiating format (together with the US and the EU);

3. To the Romanian authorities:
   - to work closely with the Committee of Ministers and the Romanian Chair to enhance co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union;
   - to undertake joint activities to promote inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue;

27. Working visit to Brussels (7-8 December 2005)

I was in Brussels on 7-8 December 2005.

1. In the morning, I attended and addressed the Forum “Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe” organised by Europa Nostra

In my speech, I underlined the importance of:

- culture and cultural heritage as a means to bring down barriers and build bridges of peace and understanding;
- the importance of civil society;
- the need to enhance the partnership between parliamentarians and civil society and work
together in important areas such as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;

In the evening, I made the opening speech at the closing dinner of the Forum presided by His Royal Highness the Prince Consort of Denmark, the President of Europa Nostra, and in the presence of Guests of Honour Jan Figel, European Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture Training and Multilingualism, and Anne-Marie Sigmund, President of the European Economic and Social Committee.

2. I met with EU Foreign Policy Chief Javier Solana with whom I discussed co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, in particular:

- The EU Neighbourhood Policy;
- The Agency of Fundamental Rights;
- Quadripartite meetings;
- Kosovo;
- Allegations of CIA detention centres in Council of Europe/EU member states

Mr Solana considers the Council of Europe a very important partner of the European Union. The Council of Europe, with instruments like the Venice Commission, can play a very important role in developments in Kosovo and other Western Balkan countries.

With regard to allegations on CIA detention centres in Council of Europe and EU member states, like Vice-President Frattini before him, Mr Solana extended his full support to PACE’s enquiry.

3. I had a working lunch with Mr Mendes de Vigo and Mrs Kinga Gál, members of the European Parliament.

Mrs Gál is European Parliament Rapporteur on the Agency of Fundamental Rights.

Our discussions focused on the concerns of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly with regard to the geographical remit of the Agency and how could we best co-operate and co-ordinate to avoid duplication by the Agency of work already carried out very efficiently by the Council of Europe.

4. In the afternoon, I had a meeting with Mr Herman De Croo, President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Belgian Parliament.

Our discussions focused on the forthcoming Conference of Presidents of Parliaments of the member states that will take place in Tallinn, Estonia, on 30 and 31 May 2006. Mr De Croo has kindly accepted my proposal to be one of the keynote speakers in the Conference, notably on the theme “Bridge-building through Parliamentary Diplomacy”.

Belgium will be in the Chair of the OSCE in 2006, and with our colleague De Croo, we discussed co-operation and co-ordination between the two Assemblies in areas of common interest.

We also discussed co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, in particular the report under preparation by Mr Juncker.

I have received an invitation to address the Committee on European Affairs of the Belgium Chamber of Deputies. The Committee will also have a debate on the activities of the Council of Europe.

5. On the 8 December, I had a long and very fruitful meeting with Mr Guy Verhofstad, Prime Minister of Belgium.

Our discussions focused on the need for better co-operation and co-ordination between the Council of Europe and the European Union. Prime Minister Verhofstad is aware of our concerns with regard to the EU Agency of Fundamental Rights and the EU Neighbourhood Policy. He fully supports the approach of the Assembly not to conclude any memorandum of understanding between the two organisations before Mr Juncker has submitted his report and recommendations on the co-operation between our two institutions.

Belgium will be in the Chair of the OSCE in 2006 and we discussed co-operation between the two institutions with regard to Belarus and other member states. In this context, Prime Minister Verhofstad has agreed to a preliminary invitation to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during one of its forthcoming sessions (possibly June 2006).

We also discussed allegations of CIA detention centres in European states and agreed on the need to carry out a full inquiry in order to prevent any wrongdoing in the future.

Media activities:

During my visit in Brussels, I had several interviews with regard to the PACE enquiry into alle-
I spoke to journalists from the Associated Press, Radio Nederland, NRC Handelsblad, ANP and had an interview for Channel 4 News that was broadcast in its prime time news at 8pm on 7 December.

28. Official visit to Greece (7-12 February 2006)

At the invitation of the Speaker of Parliament Professor Anna Benaki I visited Greece from 7-12 February 2006.

During my visit I met with:

1. Mr K. Papoulias, President of the Republic;
2. Mrs. A. Benaki, President of Parliament;
3. Mr K. Karamanlis, Prime Minister;
4. Mr P. Molyviatis, Minister for Foreign Affairs;
5. Mr G. Papandreou, Leader of the Opposition party (PASOC) and President of the International Socialist Parties;
6. Mrs A. Papriga, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Greece;
7. Mr Al. Alavanos, President of the Coalition of the Left of Movements and Ecology.

In my meetings I discussed:

1. strengthening co-operation between PACE and national parliaments;
2. the Forthcoming Conference of Speakers in Tallinn on 30 and 31 May 2006;
3. co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union;
4. implementation of the decisions of the Third Summit of the Council of Europe;
5. the controversy and violent response to Danish caricatures;
6. political developments in the Western Balkans and future enlargement;
7. Greece and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (FYROM) - the name dispute;
8. developments in Cyprus;
9. the future status of Kosovo;
10. allegations of CIA detention centres in Europe;
11. the PACE report “Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes”

My Greek interlocutors underlined the special value of the Council of Europe as an organisation that stands for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Parliamentarianism and parliamentary democracy have become increasingly important. I received very encouraging remarks regarding the Assembly’s and my personal efforts to strengthen the relationship with national parliaments, which represent and work to promote the interest of the people.

We agreed on the need to step up co-operation with the European Union in order to avoid duplication and waste of resources. I expressed concerns with regard to EU plans to establish a Fundamental Rights Agency, in particular about the geographical remit of the Agency.

I stressed that we in the Parliamentary Assembly do not see the added value of an EU Agency of Human Rights. There is no need for any new monitoring system or human rights forum. Additional institutions risk creating unnecessary duplication of the activities of the Council of Europe.

The overall system of human rights protection in Europe would be undermined if the Agency were to be established on the basis of the current proposal put forward by the Commission.

We agreed that the report under preparation by Prime Minister Juncker of Luxembourg will contribute to creating a new framework for enhanced co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

On the issue of Cyprus, we agreed on the need to step up efforts to find a viable solution.

All parties concerned have become weary at the lack of a solution to the problem. I stressed that the position of our Assembly concerning Cyprus has not changed. PACE will continue to be part of the international efforts to come to an agreement. The Assembly fully back the efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

My Greek interlocutors seem to favour a fresh start to the process of negotiations. Greece is in favour of a viable and effective solution for reuniting the island.

Greek interlocutors said they are working with their counterparts in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” (FYROM) to find a solution to the name dispute. For my part, I assured them that the Assembly’s work on this issue will be part of the international efforts, in particular those of the Secretary General of the UN, to find a viable solution.
Referring to the controversy and violent response to Danish caricatures in several countries worldwide, we agreed on the need to strike a balance between freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs and creeds.

We agreed that there cannot be a democratic society without the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information, but underlined that freedom of thought, conscience and religion constitutes one of the essential freedoms of individuals.

I stressed that rights come with responsibilities and that the media should use their power to cultivate peace and understanding, as well as respect for what other cultures and religions hold most sacred.

These events have made it painfully clear that there is a lack of common understanding of the basic values enshrined in the Council of Europe, a lack of understanding of cultures and religions other than one's own.

I underlined that it is most important to exchange experience and information and build on a continuous dialogue in order to learn to appreciate the diverse cultures and religions around us.

Our Assembly, which brings together politicians of every creed and culture in Europe, provides an important forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

The crisis brought about by the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands last year has led to questions being raised about the future of EU enlargement.

With my Greek interlocutors, however, we agreed on the need to give countries in the region clear perspectives about their integration in European structures.

If the EU does not stick to the promises it has made about the Western Balkans’ long-term prospect of membership, Europe and the EU will lose credibility and the already volatile situation in the Western Balkan countries might lead to political instability and social unrest.

Greece is very interested to have peace and stability in its most immediate neighbouring countries and will continue to provide its support to their integration in the EU as it has been doing with Turkey and FYROM.

We agreed that any settlement with regard to the future status of Kosovo should not destabilise the region. Implementation of standards should be a key condition of any settlement.

Greek interlocutors assured me that it would be extremely difficult for the CIA to have operated detention centres in Greece without the knowledge of the Greek government. Greek authorities believe there have been no such centres on Greek territory.

They promised full co-operation with the PACE inquiry and will respond in due time to the questionnaire sent out by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

PACE’s report on the “Need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes” stirred controversy and emotions in the Greek political scene and among Greek people.

Greek interlocutors explained that the reaction to the report in Greece could be explained by the role played by the Communist Party of Greece and Greek communists during the Second World War. The civil war that followed, also answers in part the way the report was received in Greece and among Greek politicians.

In my discussions with Greek interlocutors I stressed once again that the report did not seek to condemn communist parties or communist ideologies. That would be a clear violation of the freedom of expression, a cornerstone in the work of the Council of Europe and its Assembly. I reiterated however that crimes, no matter who perpetrated them, should be condemned in the strongest terms.

During my visit to Greece, I addressed a speech to a common session of the National Defence and Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Public Administration, Public Order and Justice Committees of the Greek Parliament. The main themes of the speech included:

• strengthening the effectiveness of our Assembly;
• strengthening and streamlining relations with our partner institutions, in particular the EU
• Implementation of the decisions of the Third Council of Europe Summit;
• Promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue
• Cyprus;
• The Western Balkans;
Visits and meetings

In addition, I met with NGOs dealing with the protection of the environmental cultural heritage of Greece, notably the Vice-President of Elliniki Etairia (Association for the protection of the Environment and the Cultural Heritage), the President of the Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean States, the Director of the WWF Greece, the Director of Greenpeace Greece, the President of the Greek Organisation for the Promotion of Culture, the Foreign Affairs Director of "Citizen In Deed" – an umbrella organisation for all voluntary NGOs.

The Minister for Tourism and former PACE member Mr Pavlidis and the Greek member of the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) and Vice-President of the Greek Head Organisation of Human Rights were also present at the meeting with NGOs.

At the Greek Parliament, Speaker Benaki honoured me with the Gold Medal of the Greek Parliament. I was also proclaimed an “Honorary Citizen of the Greek State's first capital Nafplion”.

During my meeting with Prime Minister Karamanlis, I invited him to address the Parliamentary Assembly during one of its forthcoming sessions.

29. Conference on Belarus (Prague, 22-23 February 2006)

This conference was organised jointly by PACE and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

On the basis of Assembly Resolution 1482 adopted this January, Mr Cyril Svoboda, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and I took the initiative to convene this conference in Prague.

The conference focused on three main issues:

1. the situation in Belarus on the eve of the 2006 presidential election;
2. the place of Belarus in new Europe;
3. strategies for assisting democratisation.

The discussions were very lively and brought together Ministers of Foreign Affairs and their Deputies from a number of European countries - mostly those neighbouring Belarus - members of PACE, the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe and representatives of the Belarusian opposition and civil society.

I invited Mr Konoplev, Speaker of the Belarus Chamber of Representatives, to take part in this conference. I regret very much that it was not possible for him to attend it as I believe that it would have been very useful for the participants to have heard the position of the authorities of Belarus.

In the Joint Statement Mr Svoboda and I made at the end of the conference, which largely reflects the opinions expressed by participants, we encouraged Council of Europe member states to strengthen their support for the further development of democratic forces and civil society in Belarus and ending the isolation of the Belarusian people.

We stressed the importance that we attach to the forthcoming presidential election being held in a free and fair manner, consistent with international standards.

We also made a concrete proposal to establish an Information Office/Centre of the Council of Europe in Belarus, with a view to promoting awareness among the Belarusian population at large of Council of Europe principles and values, as already demanded in Assembly Recommendation 1734 (2006) on the Situation in Belarus on the eve of the presidential election.

I firmly believe it is absolutely necessary to establish a presence of the Council of Europe in Belarus. I have therefore addressed letters to the Chairman-in-Office of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General, the EU Commission, the European Parliament, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, as well as to the Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives of Belarus, asking them to support this initiative, which could be co-financed by the EU.

A summary report on the conference, comprising statements of keynote speakers, has been prepared by the secretariat of the Political Affairs Committee and we will come back to this issue under a specific item on the agenda of this Bureau meeting.

30. 15th high-level “3+3” meeting (Brussels, 30 January 2006)

Joint Declaration issued at the 15th High-level "3+3" meeting I met the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Romanian Foreign Minister Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu,
OSCE Chairman-in-Office Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Grucht and the Secretaries General of the two Organisations, Terry Davis and Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, as well as the Secretary General of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Spencer Oliver (representing President Hastings), in Brussels on 30 January for the 15th Council of Europe-OSCE high-level meeting.

The partner organisations stressed the importance of promoting security, peace and stability based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout Europe without any dividing lines.

They underscored the need for the OSCE and the Council of Europe to ensure complementarity, taking into account their respective fields of excellence.

Co-operation between the two organisations on a number of regional and thematic issues was discussed, highlighting the need to build on good practice and further strengthen synergies between the OSCE and the Council of Europe, including in the field.

Welcoming the Action Plan of the Third Council of Europe Summit (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005) and the Declaration on Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE, participants commended the work of the OSCE-Council of Europe Co-ordination Group, which had initially focused on the fight against terrorism, the protection of national minorities, the fight against intolerance and discrimination, and the fight against trafficking in human beings. They called on the Group to intensify its work and identify further priority areas.

The need to resolve conflict situations through political dialogue was stressed. This was essential to achieve democratic stability and sustainable development in the regions in which both organisations operated.

The meeting discussed the situation in Kosovo/Serbia and Montenegro. Participants expressed their sadness at the death of Ibrahim Rugova, who had been deeply committed to non-violence. They called on Kosovo’s people and their political leaders to work together, saying his death should not be allowed to jeopardise the efforts to find a just and peaceful solution for the future status of Kosovo. Commending the decision to begin status talks, they stressed the importance of renewed focus on standards implementation. Decentralisation and the protection of community/minority rights were identified as key issues for both Organisations.

Participants also welcomed the start of the dialogue among international organisations regarding their engagement in post-status Kosovo. They gave their full support to the efforts of the Special Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari, and pledged to continue assisting in the democratic institution-building of Kosovo, in close co-operation with all the international and local partners on the ground.

On Montenegro, participants said they expected the authorities to implement the recommendations of the Venice Commission and those of the OSCE/ODIHR with regard to the organisation and the conduct of a referendum in accordance with European standards. They encouraged the authorities and the pro-union opposition parties to agree, through dialogue, on the referendum terms. Principles, accepted by all major political groupings in Montenegro with the support of the international community, were crucial to ensure future political stability. Participants stressed that the two Organisations would continue to support the work of Ambassador Miroslav Lajčák, Personal Representative of the EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, to facilitate negotiations among political forces in Montenegro on the arrangements for the proposed referendum.

When discussing the Transnistrian conflict, participants called for a continuation of a constructive political dialogue with a view to finding a permanent negotiated settlement based on respect for Moldova’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. They expressed the hope that current tensions between the sides could be lessened in the new negotiation format, including the EU and US as observers. They also called on all parties concerned to implement fully the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, in particular in the case of Ilascu and others.

On the South Caucasus, the participants reiterated their support for the territorial integrity of the states of the region. With regard to the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts, the representatives of the Organisations said they would continue to contribute to the creation of conditions conducive to progress towards a lasting and peaceful settlement. On the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the two Organisations called for a peaceful set-
tlement and reiterated the importance of the ongoing activities in the framework of the OSCE Minsk Process towards a lasting and comprehensive political solution. They agreed to continue to interact closely on initiatives concerning the settlement of the dispute, which both Armenia and Azerbaijan had committed themselves to resolve peacefully when they joined the Council of Europe. They underlined that to achieve a peaceful settlement it was important to consolidate democratic reform.

On Ukraine, the meeting underlined the crucial importance of the forthcoming parliamentary elections for the continuation and consolidation of the democratic reform process for which both Organisations pledged renewed support. They voiced satisfaction at the way the parliamentary election process was being conducted and welcomed Ukraine’s clear commitment to democratic progress and reform.

On Belarus, participants welcomed the invitation for the OSCE to observe the forthcoming March 19 presidential elections. They called on the Belarusian authorities to abide by their international commitments to allow the organisation and conduct of fair, free and democratic elections permitting all candidates to campaign without hindrance or obstruction. They also expressed concern about restrictions on the media and civil society, in particular through recently adopted legislation. In this context, they referred to the discussions held on 26 January in the Council of Europe, and in particular to the texts adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on that occasion, as well as to recent statements made by the Chairman of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers and by the Chairman-in-office of the OSCE.

The main points in my speech were:

- We need to be aware that the composition of our societies nowadays no longer matches that of the societies that existed when the social models and systems were founded.

- Social models and social security systems are not just about money; more importantly they are about social cohesion; the social cohesion we know from within the Council of Europe.

- The European social model was built on, and still rests on, the pillars of the Council of Europe: freedom, stability and prosperity.

- We need to show (more) solidarity with the European neighbourhood countries, and show these countries possibilities for new prospects.

Later that day I met with Elmar Brok, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament. We discussed the European Commission’s proposal to establish a Fundamental Rights Agency and I invited Mr Brok to the second part of the 2006 Ordinary Session. He accepted my invitation.

When in Brussels I also met with Mr Abdurrahman Mattalitti, the Indonesian Ambassador to Belgium. We talked about the need to intensify interfaith and intercultural dialogue, especially after the incidents and discussions that rose after the published cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper.

32. Working visit to Moscow (27-28 March 2006)

I visited Moscow on 27 and 28 March 2006 for discussions with the authorities on the priorities of the forthcoming chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which the Russian Federation will hold from May to November 2006.

Meetings held:

The visit took place in a very constructive spirit and our discussions were frank and open.

I held talks with the Speaker of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov; the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov; the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration, Vladislav Surkov; the Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation, Sergey Prikhodko; and the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly.
headed by Konstantin Kosachev, Chair of the State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee.

Main topics discussed:

The topics discussed during the visit included, in particular, Russia’s place in Europe and European institutions, the relationship between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the situation in Belarus following the presidential election on 19 March, possible initiatives to resolve regional conflicts and joint activities between PACE and the State Duma in connection with their chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

At the same time, I raised our main critical points with regard to Russia. I urged my interlocutors to do their utmost to ensure that Russia ratifies Protocol No. 6 on the abolition of the death penalty as soon as possible. I stressed that we need to continue our co-operation on the situation in Chechnya, freedom of media, functioning of NGOs and the Ilascu case. I also reminded the authorities of the necessity to sign and ratify Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights amending the control mechanism of the Convention.

Main political message of the visit:

For the first time in history, I pointed out, Russia is set to chair a democratic European organisation. This chairmanship offers a great opportunity to open a new era in our relationship with Russia, ensuring that old rivalries will not be revived and that there will be no more dividing lines in Europe. I expressed my conviction that Russia will seek to strengthen our Organisation’s unique role in Europe.

Russia is important to the Council of Europe and the Council of Europe is important to Russia. I stressed the necessity of establishing a strategic partnership with Russia, based on mutual trust and close permanent contacts. I underlined that co-operation with Russia must be based on dialogue instead of coercion, but it must bring, step by step, concrete results as regards the situation of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Belarus

I asked my interlocutors to give support to Council of Europe efforts to promote democratic developments in Belarus. I repeated that I was not in favour of isolating this country. Therefore, while providing assistance to civil society, we also need to maintain contacts with the authorities. I asked, in particular, Minister Lavrov to support the establishment of a Council of Europe Information Office in Minsk.

At the same time, I used this opportunity to stress, both during our joint press conference with Mr Kosachev and during my numerous interviews, that people have the full right to demonstrate and I condemned the use of force and detentions both of opposition leaders and ordinary citizens.

Parliamentary dimension

Parliamentary diplomacy is an essential part of the dialogue with Russia. I, therefore, discussed the following proposals for joint activities to be held in connection with the Russian Chairmanship.

April 2006

I accepted the invitation of Mr Gryzlov, Speaker of the State Duma, to address as guest speaker the extraordinary meeting of the State Duma taking place on 27 April 2006 in St Petersburg. I will also address the Conference on European Parliamentarism co-organised by PACE, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly and the State Duma on 28 April 2006 in St Petersburg.

May 2006

The Assembly Standing Committee and Bureau will meet in Moscow (29 May) and hold an exchange of views with Minister Lavrov.

June part-session (26-30 June 2006)

Exchange of views with Minister Lavrov in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers (to be confirmed).

October part-session (2-6 October 2006)

Exchange of views with Minister Lavrov in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers.

I also discussed the possibility of Mr Putin, President of the Russian Federation, addressing the Assembly during this part-session.

September 2006

Participation of the State Duma in the conference on good governance in sport co-organised by PACE and UEFA in Strasbourg.
Visits and meetings

October-November 2006

Conference on the role of political parties co-organised by the State Duma and PACE in Moscow (to be confirmed)

33. European People’s Party Congress
(Rome, 30-31 March 2006)

In my speech at the 17th European People’s Party Congress in Rome, coinciding with the 30th anniversary of the EPP’s founding, I called for EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights as a crucial guarantee against new dividing lines in the implementation of human rights in Europe.

I said that the European Union must take much greater advantage of the Council of Europe’s unique instruments and mechanisms for promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

I stressed the fact that Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker will address PACE at its spring session to present his report on the relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union. The report will be providing us with the cornerstone for future relations between the organisations.

During the Congress, I also had meetings and discussions with Mr Juncker, Mr Frattini, Mr Kosachev and Mr van den Brande.

34. Visit to the Vatican, audience with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI (Vatican, 3 April 2006)

At a private audience in Rome on 3 April with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, we discussed relations between different religions. The role of the Parliamentary Assembly as a forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue was also stressed.

The role of the Council of Europe as a community of values with, at its core, human dignity, was also emphasised.

The importance of ethical values and the promotion of values by the church were discussed. The extraordinary role of the late Pope, John Paul II, and his mission of peace was also brought up.

With Cardinal Sodano, I discussed relations between the Holy See and the Council of Europe, and in particular the Parliamentary Assembly, as well as relations with civil society.

On behalf of the Assembly, I invited His Holiness to address the Parliamentary Assembly.

35. Participation in the special session of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, to celebrate its first centenary, and in the Conference on European Parliamentarianism (St Petersburg, 27-28 April 2006)

On 27 April, I addressed a special session of the State Duma of the Russian Federation held on the occasion of its first centenary. In the evening, the President of the Russian Federation, Mr Vladimir Putin, joined the participants and made a statement.

On 28 April, I co-chaired the “International Conference on European Parliamentarianism: Past and Present”, jointly organised by PACE, the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly and the State Duma. The final declaration adopted at this conference is appended.

I held a series of bilateral meetings, in particular with the President of the State Duma, the President of the Council of the Federation, the Speaker of the Parliaments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Latvia and Belarus. I also met Mr Hastings, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

This was the fourth time I have visited Russia since my election as President in January 2005.

In my address (available on the Assembly’s website at “http://assembly.coe.int”), I called for a new impetus in the partnership between Russia and the rest of Europe.

I stressed the importance of ensuring constructive and friendly relations with Russia, which need an extra impetus. We must strengthen mutual trust and confidence, co-operate on an equal footing as the key to success, build on stability and durability, shoulder our responsibilities in solving conflicts and consolidate peace.

With respect to the forthcoming Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, I stressed that it will be the first time Russia chairs a European democratic organisation. I stressed that Russia must seize this opportunity to strengthen its role on the
European international scene and we must use this Russian Chairmanship as the starting point of our roadmap to a fully-fledged partnership on the European continent.

This roadmap must be based on four crucial conditions: a partnership with mutual trust and confidence, a partnership on an equal footing, a common aim for stability and durability and the acceptance of the foundation of common values.

This partnership also means endorsing the values of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. In this connection, I recalled that there was no such thing as ‘Western values’, which, as some voices were claiming, were not adapted for Russia, there are only universal human values, which Russia decided to respect when it joined the Council of Europe ten years ago.

I also recalled that in 2006, Russia was the only member of the Council of Europe not to have ratified Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights and urged the State Duma to take the crucial and historic step to abolish the death penalty in law without further delay.

36. Committee of Ministers
(Stasbourg, 17-19 May 2006)

On 19 May, I attended and addressed the 116th Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

In my speech to the organisation’s executive body, I called for the modernisation of relations between the Council of Europe’s two statutory bodies, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, in order to exploit the potential of our organisation more effectively.

I underlined the fact that we cannot continue with the same institutional arrangements that were considered adequate almost sixty years ago, for an organisation which at the time counted only ten member states.

I stressed that the forthcoming Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union should be based on the conclusions and specific proposals put forward by Luxembourg Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker in his recent report on Council of Europe-EU relations.

The forthcoming Memorandum should also take into account the parliamentary dimension and address the participation of elected representatives in the co-ordination meeting between the two institutions.

37. COSAC meeting and official visit to Austria
(22-23 May 2006)

I visited Austria on 22-23 May 2006. I held several bilateral meetings on the margins of the conference of the European Affairs Committees of the national parliaments and the European parliament (COSAC).

On the 22 May, I met with Mr Jo Leinen, the Deputy Chairman of the European Parliament’s Committee on Constitutional Affairs.

We agreed that Mr Juncker’s report on the relationship between the EU and the Council of Europe should be discussed in the European Parliament, especially as regards the parliamentary dimension of the European Union. Mr Leinen said he would do his utmost to place the report on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the constitutional affairs committee.

On the 23 May I met with the Austrian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Mr Winkler. The main topic of the meeting was the proposal to establish an EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

Our opinions differed. Mr Winkler stated his confidence that a (political) agreement might be reached under the Austrian EU Presidency. Mr Winkler based this assumption on the fact that several political agreements had been reached between the parties involved. I repeatedly elaborated on the opinion and position of the PACE.

I also met with Andreas Kohl, Speaker of the Austrian Parliament. We discussed the role of parliaments on the European level.

Mr Kohl explained that, four times a year, the Austrian parliament holds a “Europe day” in which it discusses, with the Austrian government, two main topics concerning Europe. In addition, we talked about Russia, the Fundamental Rights Agency, the increase of European agencies in general and the need to enhance the link between European and PACE politics at the national level.

In the afternoon I had a meeting with the Austrian delegation to PACE.

Several topics were discussed: intercultural
dialogue, the proposal for a Fundamental Rights Agency, the Juncker report and the role of MPs at both national and PACE level.

We agreed on the need to step up efforts in order to develop an effective and ambitious intercultural dialogue. We also agreed on the need to promote a central role for the Assembly and MPs in the Forum for Democracy.

As regards the Fundamental Rights Agency, the Austrian delegation is of the opinion that the current Centre on Racism and Xenophobia can and should do more than its current mandate.

The Juncker Report has the support of the Austrian delegation. The Austrian MPs share my opinion that more should be done to bring PACE and its work to the forefront of national politics; the double mandates of members of the PACE could be an effective instrument to that end.

In the Austrian Parliament, the Minister responsible already meets regularly with the PACE delegation and controversial recommendations of the PACE are being discussed.

38. Standing Committee meeting (Moscow, 29 May 2006)

On the occasion of the meeting of the Standing Committee, on 29 May 2006, I met Mr Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation. We had a very open and constructive discussion.

On my side, I stressed that Russia’s chairmanship of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers is an opportunity for Russia to demonstrate that it is a full part of democratic Europe, as an equal partner. At the same time, it is an opportunity for the Council of Europe to demonstrate its pan-European character and its added value in comparison with the EU, and to build up a sustainable partnership with Russia based on mutual respect and trust. Without such partnership, there will be no guarantee for stability, security and prosperity on the whole European continent.

I expressed hope that the Russian chairmanship will achieve progress in negotiating a meaningful agreement between the Council of Europe and the EU, with a strong parliamentary dimension.

I invited Russia to fully co-operate in strengthening civil society and in finding solutions for frozen conflicts and help finding new ways of dialogue with Belarus.

I underlined that with respect to human rights, the rule of law and democracy, Russia, as other member states, has still some way to go. For the Council of Europe, having a Russian Chairmanship doesn’t mean turning a blind eye to outstanding commitments.

In this connection, I welcomed the recent sentence of life imprisonment of the only surviving Beslan terrorist, Nurpashi Kulayev, as a clear signal of Russia’s respect for a de facto moratorium on the death penalty, set up in line with its commitments at Council of Europe level. I expressed hope that this moratorium would soon result in a de jure abolition of the death penalty.

I also raised the question of the settlement of the conflict in the Chechen Republic and the contribution of Russia to the promotion of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

President Putin expressed his appreciation for the work of the Council of Europe. He said that, in the post-Soviet Union area, the most important challenge was to determine how to implement the Council of Europe’s general principles in these specific circumstances.

On the issue of the death penalty, Russia will maintain the moratorium, even though 90 per cent of the population is in favour of the death penalty. It is important to avoid abolition death penalty becoming an issue during the forthcoming elections in Russia, which could have adverse consequences. Therefore, it is essential to intensify information work among the population, explaining the arguments against the death penalty.

On the Chechen Republic, President Putin said that Russia was willing to hold a dialogue with any political forces except those whose objective was the disintegration of the Russian Federation. Russia was also open to any form of co-operation with the Council of Europe on this issue.

On frozen conflicts, President Putin underlined that it was important to use the same standards and criteria for solving these conflicts. It was not acceptable for Russia that different approaches are applied, for example, in the Balkans and in the post-Soviet Union area.

I invited President Putin to address the Assembly at one of its next plenary meetings in
Strasbourg, ideally in October during the Russian Chairmanship. He expressed his hope that he would be able to honour this invitation.

On the occasion of the meeting of the Standing Committee, I also met the Speaker of the State Duma Boris Gryzlov and Mr Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister and Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers.

39. European Conference of Presidents and Speakers of Parliaments
(Tallinn, 30-31 May 2006)

Some 40 Speakers and Presidents of Parliaments from the 46 Council of Europe member states, as well as the heads of the European Parliament, the Nordic Council, the WEU Assembly and Benelux, participated in this parliamentary summit on the themes “Bridge-building through parliamentary diplomacy” and “The role of parliaments in promoting pluralistic democracy at home and abroad”.

I met many Presidents of Parliaments on this occasion. I also had a very fruitful meeting with Mr Borrell, President of the European Parliament, with whom I reached agreement on the following issues:

A. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Council of Europe and the European Union

We agreed to propose an addendum to the MoU on the relations between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament. This addendum would be prepared by a small joint working group composed of:

on the Assembly’s side:
- The Chair of the Political Affairs Committee (Mr Ates)
- The Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee (Mr Kosachev)
- The Chairman of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights (Mr Marty)

on the European Parliament’s side:
- The Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee (Mr Brok)
- The Chairman of the Committee on Civil Liberties (Mr Cavada)
- The Chairman of the Conference of Committee Chairmen (Mr Daul)

B. Quadrupartite meetings between the Council of Europe and the EU

We agreed to send a joint letter requesting that the parliamentary dimension should be included in these meetings. The Presidents of both Assemblies should take part in the next quadrupartite meeting planned on 2 November 2006 in Brussels.

C. EU Fundamental Rights Agency

We agreed to organise a meeting with Mr Frattini and parliamentarians concerned of both Assemblies (possibly Mr Marty, Mr Cavada, Mr Ates and Mr Brok) on this matter.

D. Meeting between the PACE Presidential Committee and the European Parliament Conference of Presidents

We agreed to hold the next meeting before the end of the year.

40. Commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Finland’s parliamentary reform of 1906
(Helsinki, 1-2 June 2006)

In Helsinki, I took part in these celebrations and used this opportunity to meet Mrs Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, and Finnish Foreign Minister Mr Erkki Tuomioja.

I welcomed the intention of the forthcoming Finnish Presidency of the European Union to make improving EU–Russia relations a priority and stressed that the coincidence of Finland’s Presidency of the EU with Russia’s Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers was an excellent opportunity for Europe as a whole.

I urged Finland and Russia to use this coincidence to make progress in the current negotiations over a Memorandum of Understanding on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union and to give due weight to the parliamentary dimension.

41. Working visit to Brussels (6-7 June 2006)

During my visit to Brussels on 6 and 7 June 2006 I had several bilateral meetings as well as more general exchanges of views and discussions.

As regards the European Parliament, I spoke with Martin Schultz (leader of the Socialist Group), Graham Watson (leader of the Liberal
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and Democrat Group), Jacek Emil Saryusz-Wolski (Vice-President of the European Parliament), Klaus Hänsch (former President of the European Parliament and current member), Bogdan Klich (Chairman of the delegation for relations with Belarus) and with Elmar Brok (Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs).

With Mr Brok I also discussed possible joint initiatives with regard to co-operation between the European Parliament (the EU) and PACE (the Council of Europe).

Furthermore, I also spoke with several members of the European Commission: Mrs Ferrero-Waldner (External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy), Mr Piebalgs (Energy), Mr Frattini (Freedom, Security and Justice) and the President of the European Commission, Mr Barroso.

With Commissioner Frattini I also looked ahead to his participation in the third part of the 2006 Ordinary Session in June.

During these meetings the main topics of discussion were the (bilateral) and multilateral relations with Russia, and the Russian presidency of the Council of Europe. There was specific interest in the PACE Monitoring report on the honouring of obligations and commitments by the Russian Federation.

With many of the interlocutors I also spoke about issues of general concern to PACE in general and received their broad support. As regards the European proposal to establish an EU Fundamental Rights Agency, I expressed on many occasions the view and especially the concerns of PACE.

42. European People’s Party Summit (Brussels, 15-16 May 2006)

On 15 June 2006 I attended the European Peoples Party Summit in Brussels. On the margins of the Summit, I met with several representatives of national politics and European institutions.

I discussed with them a number of issues of concern to PACE, such as the proposed addendum to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the EU, the follow-up to the Juncker report and the proposal to establish an EU Fundamental Rights Agency.

I stressed the need for European Council conclusions to make reference to the Juncker Report and co-operation between the Council of Europe and the EU. Such reference was made in the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council meeting on 15-16 June 2006, which reads as follows:

“The European Council attaches great importance to a fruitful co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe and encourages them to overcome the remaining difficulties in the ongoing negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding. It expresses its appreciation to Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker for his report on the future relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union, which deserves further consideration.”

43. Official visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia (6-14 July 2006)

At the invitation of the Speakers of the Parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, I visited these countries from 6 to 14 July 2006.

Whilst the countries in the region have achieved significant progress in becoming functioning democracies after a decade that wrecked the economy and brought political havoc upon them, there are significant challenges ahead.

Ethnic divisions and ethnic tensions still run fairly high. The political situation is still very fragile and economic progress has been very slow.

Constitutional reform, reform of the judiciary, educational reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime, refugees and internally displaced persons are some of the significant challenges ahead.

Although all four countries do not share exactly the same problems, they do however share the same foreign policy orientation – integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

With regard to the latter, I stressed the fact that whilst the EU should keep its promises, countries in the region that aspire for EU membership should respect their commitments and obligations and fulfil and implement their Council of Europe obligations which are very similar to the Copenhagen criteria.
My visit to the region was widely covered by local, national and regional press and media.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (6-8 July 2006)

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, I met with Mr Goran Milojevic, Speaker of the House of Peoples, Mr Martin Raguz, Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Deputy Speakers of both Houses, Mr Sulejman Tihic and Mr Borislav Paravac, members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr Zlatko Lagumdzija, President of the SDP, Mr Haris Silajdzic, President of the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina, and representatives of NGOs (Children – Pillars of the World, the Centre for the promotion of civil society, and the Centre grouping former army officers and victims of the war).

I also met with Mr Christian Schwartz Schilling, High Representative, had a working breakfast with EU Ambassadors of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK and met with Ms Ams Zwerver, Head of the Cabinet of the Representative of OSCE to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In our meetings we discussed the situation in the country, progress achieved in building a stable, functional and efficient state, and the challenges ahead.

With all interlocutors we discussed the failure of the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina to adopt the constitutional amendments and consequences of such a failure for the future of the country. I highlighted the position of the Assembly that Bosnia and Herzegovina should promote domestic ownership and responsibility for reform.

The political situation and political developments in the region were raised in the discussions. Among other issues, I discussed the need to adopt the draft higher education law, to reform the judiciary, to co-operate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and to deal with the needs of refugees and internally displaced persons living in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One particularly worrying development in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the situation in the education sector. There will be no reconciliation, and efforts to promote “living together and not side by side in one’s country” are doomed to fail, if Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to promote education based on ethnic origin.

On 7 July, I addressed a joint plenary session of both Houses of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In my speech I praised the country’s achievements and recalled that it has a long way to go before it becomes an efficient and functioning democracy. I highlighted problems arising from the failure to adopt constitutional amendments and encouraged the people and politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina to resume discussions about constitutional reform once elections take place. I encouraged authorities to overcome political disputes, hate-speech and ethnic division and work together towards building an efficient state, based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

During my visit to Mostar, I was impressed by progress achieved in re-building the city, although ethnic division, in particular in the field of education, is regretfully still a serious concern. I discussed this and other current issues with Mr Martin Raguz, Speaker of the House of Representatives, who accompanied me during the visit.

On my way from Mostar to Dubrovnik, I met with a number of returnees and discussed with them problems that they face in re-building their lives. I raised the issue of refugees and displaced persons with all my official interlocutors in all four countries.

Croatia, 9-10 July 2006

At the invitation of the Speaker of the Parliament of Croatia Mr Vladimir Šeks, I participated and contributed to the Croatia Summit: “Completing Europe’s Southern Dimension: The Values That Bind Us” which took place in Dubrovnik on 10 July 2006.

In my speech to the conference, I urged the countries of South-East Europe to be tough on reform, uncompromising on corruption and to fight against organised crime if they want to become genuine functioning democracies and fulfil their aspirations to join Euro-Atlantic structures.

I stressed the need for both the EU to keep its promises to South-East Europe, and for countries of the region to fulfil and implement Council of Europe commitments and the EU Copenhagen criteria.

During my address, I emphasised the very important role played by the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly in assisting
countries in South-East Europe on their road to becoming genuine functioning democracies which respect the core values of our Organisation – democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

I had bilateral meetings with the Speaker of the Parliament of Croatia Mr Vladimir Šeks, the President of Croatia Mr Stjepan Mesić, Prime Minister Sanader, and Mrs Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration and Mrs Dubravka Suica, Mayor of Dubrovnik and Chairwoman of the Croatian Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. I also met with Professor Dr Edravko Bazdan from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Dubrovnik.

The situation in the region, progress of reform in Croatia, in particular regarding the judiciary, implementation of the constitutional law on national minorities, the Sarajevo Declaration and issues related to refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, were at the centre of our discussions.

During my meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia Mrs Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, I recalled the contribution of the Council of Europe to democratic developments in central and eastern Europe and raised my concerns with regard to duplication of Council of Europe activities by the European Union. I also discussed with the Minister the increasingly worrying tendency of EU member states in the Council of Europe to speak and act “en bloc” within the Council of Europe.

During my meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia Mrs Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, I underlined the contribution of the Council of Europe to democratic developments in central and eastern Europe and raised my concerns with regard to duplication of Council of Europe activities by the European Union.

I also discussed with the Minister the increasingly worrying tendency of EU member states in the Council of Europe to speak and act “en bloc” within the Council of Europe.

During my meeting with the Speaker of Parliament Mr Šeks, I underlined that PACE is focusing on the core business of the Council of Europe and highlighted some of the activities of our Assembly in this context, notably on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the report on secret detention centres and CIA flights and the preparation of a report on the state of democracy and human rights in the member states of the Council of Europe. I also underlined increasing co-operation with the European Parliament in order to avoid duplication. I invited the Speaker to hold an annual debate in the parliament to deal with important issues debated by PACE.

With Prime Minister Sanader I discussed further EU enlargement and the need for candidate countries to deepen reforms and fully implement the Copenhagen criteria. Croatia has marked significant progress on its way towards joining the EU and should assist other aspiring countries in the region.

Prime Minister Sanader accepted my invitation to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during its October part-session in the context of a general debate on the Balkan region.

In my meeting with President Stjepan Mesić, I underlined the important role of the PACE in assisting countries in the region in their efforts to become functioning democracies and underlined the importance of good neighbourly relations between countries in the region. President Mesić stressed the importance of the European perspective to peace and stability in the Balkans.

During my meeting with the Mayor of Dubrovnik Mrs Dubravka Suica, we discussed the need to step up co-operation with border local authorities to contribute to good and peaceful neighbourly relations.

The issue of more and better co-operation with the neighbour countries was also discussed during my meeting with Professor Dr Edravko Bazdan from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, who felt that the authorities, both at national and local level, should do more to with regard to co-operation with their neighbours.

In the margins of the conference, I also met the Prime Minister of Albania Dr Sali Berisha, with whom I discussed political developments in Albania and in the region. Prime Minister Berisha has also accepted the invitation to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during its October part-session in the context of a general debate on the Balkan region.

During the conference, I also met and held discussions with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili.

Montenegro, 11 July 2006

In Montenegro I met with Mr Ranko Krivokapic, Speaker of Parliament, Mr Vujanovic, President of Montenegro, and Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic.

I also met with the representatives of opposition parties (Mr Predrag Bulatovic, President of the Socialist People’s Party of Montenegro, Mr
Predrag Popovic, President of the People’s Party, Mr Ranko Kadic, President of the Democratic Serb Party and their colleagues), NGO representatives Mr Srdjan Darmanovic, President of the Centre for Democracy and Human Rights, Mr Zlatko Vujovic, Executive Director of the Monitoring Centre CEMI, and Ms Robin Ruth Ellis, Head of the UNCHR Sub-Office in Podgorica, and her colleagues.

During our meetings we discussed the situation in Montenegro following the referendum that gave Montenegro independence, Montenegro’s request for membership in the Council of Europe and the challenges ahead. I stressed the importance of establishing harmonious relations with all neighbouring countries, in particular with Serbia.

I encouraged authorities and representatives of opposition parties to build on a constructive and inclusive dialogue and address fundamental issues that are very important to the functioning of democracy in Montenegro, such as good governance, corruption, and the fight against organised crime.

I also encouraged parliamentarians and authorities to work closely with the Venice Commission in the process of drafting a new constitution.

We also discussed co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the status and situation of refugees and internally displaced persons.

I had the honour to be the first foreign guest speaker to address the Parliament of Montenegro. In my speech I focussed on the future of Montenegro in the wake of its re-found independence and the need for all Montenegrins to work together towards consolidating Montenegro as a functional and genuine democratic state.

Serbia, 12-13 July 2006

In Serbia, I had meetings with the Speaker of the Parliament, Mr Pedrag Markovic, the President of Serbia Mr Boris Tadic, Deputy Prime Minister Ms Ivana Dulic Markovic, representatives of opposition political parties, and representatives of NGOs and religious leaders.

I also had a working lunch with the Ambassadors of Russia to the Republic of Serbia Mr Alexander Alekseev and Mr Hans Hageman, Charge d’Affaires from the Embassy of the Netherlands.

During the second day of my visit to Serbia, I had an exchange of views with members of the European Integration Committee of the Parliament of Serbia.

Some of the issues at the centre of our discussions included the situation in Serbia and in the region, the drafting of the new constitution and co-operation with the Venice Commission on this issue, decentralisation, the functioning of the judiciary, minorities, responding to the rise of nationalism in Serbia, co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the reform of security services, the fight against corruption and organised crime, strengthening an independent media and support for NGOs.

We also discussed the forthcoming Serbian Chair of the Committee of Ministers in 2007, which comes at a very critical moment, when national rhetoric is on the rise and there is an increasing feeling of isolation among Serbian people. The Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe will provide Serbia with the opportunity to head an international organisation and give a European perspective to its people. Serbian authorities have started preparations and expressed their commitment to make their Chair of the Committee of Ministers a success.

I focused on the post-referendum situation (which gave Montenegro independence) and emphasised the need to establish harmonious relationships with neighbouring countries. I underlined Serbia’s role and Serbia’s importance for stability in the region.

With regard to negotiations on the future status of Kosovo, I underlined that most important for all peoples of the region was to build on the future, the European future of their countries. I called for unconditional co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and underlined that justice needs to be done and all Serbian people should work together to deal with the past so that it does not become an obstacle for the future.

The Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly will continue to assist Serbia in carrying out reforms. Monitoring by the Parliamentary Assembly of the commitments and obligations of Serbia can help the country
to move forward. I emphasised the fact that monitoring is not a political punishment but an important assistance tool.

Mr Markovic mentioned some of the achievements of the parliament of Serbia and highlighted difficulties they face in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Support staff for parliamentary committees is not sufficient. Parliament has adopted a significant number of laws, but lack of experts makes it difficult to explain to citizens in a clear and a sufficient way implications and obligations that result from the adoption of laws by parliament, including those that result from international obligations undertaken by Serbia. Moreover, it is difficult to carry out the implementation of adopted laws.

The Speaker was highly appreciative of the Parliamentary Assistance Programme.

I suggested to the Speaker of the Parliament of Serbia that once or twice a year, they put in the agenda of the parliament important issues discussed by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Such a debate would also be important in the context of preparations of the forthcoming Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe by Serbia in 2007.

During my meeting with President Tadic, I expressed concerns regarding an increase in national rhetoric and lack of results regarding co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. While expressing understanding about the changes and challenges that Serbia has had to face, in particular following the independence of Montenegro, I stressed the need for the whole spectrum of political, religious and civil society in Serbia to work together towards building a European future. I also discussed the forthcoming Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe by Serbia in 2007 and reiterated PACE’s support in this context.

President Tadic underlined the need to promote European values and “de-balkanize the Balkans”. President Tadic himself has undertaken a tour in the neighbouring countries to promote European values and the region’s integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. He is seeking to promote joint initiatives to address common concerns such as poverty, corruption, organised crime and trafficking.

I invited the President of Serbia Mr Tadic to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe during its October part session in the context of a general debate on the Balkan region.

During the exchange of views with the Committee on European Integration I praised Serbia’s progress on the road to becoming a modern, open and liberal society, respectful of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

I underlined the importance of political parties and politicians working together on the basis of dialogue, compromise and consensus, the importance of delivering to Serb citizens what concerns them most - jobs, social security, education and healthcare - in order to combat rising nationalism and political radicalisation of the Serbian political spectrum and Serbian society.

We also discussed work on constitutional reform, co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, respect for minorities, support for the media and civil society as important players in a democratic society as well as the importance of profound and sustainable reforms that will take Serbia towards full integration in Euro-Atlantic structures.

In my meeting with the NGOs, we shared our concerns with regard to rising nationalism, political radicalisation and the increasing feeling of victimisation and anti-European attitudes throughout the Serbian political spectrum and ways to counteract this.

NGOs present at the meeting (Civic Initiatives, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence) expressed their concerns with regard to the lack of support for civil society (80 per cent of the total funding for NGO activities comes from international donors). A lack of support from within Serbia, such as from among the business community, has led to much distrust and negative propaganda about the activities of NGOs. They also complained about cumbersome procedures regarding EU funding for civil society.

There is fear that the current political elite, and its policies vis-à-vis the international community, might lead to the isolation of Serbia. They expressed concern with regard to the law regulating the financing of political parties in Serbia and the “ politicisation” of the Church.

In my meeting with representatives of the reli-
I stressed the important role played by religious leaders in the process of peace and stability and encouraged them to join efforts and contribute to ethnic reconciliation in Serbia and in the region.

Representatives of the three different religious communities in Serbia underlined the need for more exchange and co-operation between the different religious communities, and between the East and West in order to better understand each other's cultures and beliefs.

Finally, I was very impressed with paintings and other works of art on display in all the official buildings we visited in Belgrade.

**44. Working visit to Romania, Moldova and Ukraine (23-30 July 2006)**

Between 23-30 July, I conducted working visits to Romania and Odessa in Ukraine and an official visit to Moldova. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those who assisted in organising and conducting this lengthy and complicated mission.

In Romania, I met Mr Alexandru Peres, Vice-President of the Senate, Mr Anton Niculescu, Secretary of State within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mr Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Our discussions focussed on two main issues, follow-up to the Romanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers (including the progress being made by the current Russian chairmanship) and Romania’s candidacy for membership of the European Union.

I was especially encouraged by Mr Ungureanu’s continuing support for PACE having a strong role in the Council of Europe and urged him in particular to work towards ensuring that this was reflected in the eventual Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

In Moldova, I met Mr Marian Lupu, President of the Parliament, Mr Andrei Stratan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Mr Vasile Tarlev, Prime Minister, and Mr Vladimir Voronin, President, along with members of the PACE delegation, representatives of NGOs and of the media, leaders of the parliamentary factions, leaders of the principal religious communities and foreign diplomats. I also addressed the Parliament (the full text of my speech can be found on the Assembly's website at “http://assembly.coe.int”).

The main subjects of my discussions and speech were: Moldova’s process of integration into Europe and its foreign policy orientation; the fulfilment of its obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe, with a particular focus on issues including trafficking in human beings, corruption and media independence and plurality; the PACE monitoring procedure, which I encouraged those I met to consider as a positive and constructive form of co-operation and assistance; parliamentary transparency and the importance of ensuring effective implementation of legislation; the need to avoid relatively minor, easily resolvable problems that risked damaging Moldova’s image abroad (for example, ill-treatment of detainees, poor detention conditions and the need to transfer pre-trial detention centres from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice, and the Pasat case, which I raised in response to a request from the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights); Transnistria; the importance of positive relations with Russia in the context of a European partnership; and (with the religious leaders) intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the role of religious organisations in promoting common values and reconciliation at both national and European levels, including through the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.

In Odessa I met Mr Olexandr Moroz, Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada, Mr Skoryk, head of the Oblast Council and leaders of the factions of the Oblast Council and Mr Gurvits, Mayor of...
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Odessa. I also visited the headquarters of the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM, involved in supporting the border control authorities of Moldova and Ukraine, including around the Transnistria region), the NGO “Doroga domu” (which works to protect severely disadvantaged children) and Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa and Ismail.

With Mr Moroz, I discussed the need to establish a strong national government in order to make further progress with fulfilment of Ukraine’s obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe, Ukraine’s continuing integration into Europe, relations with Russia and the situation in Belarus, and made a point of emphasising the importance of full co-operation by the Ukrainian authorities with the EU’s Border Assistance Mission, both to ensure effective implementation of the rule of law and to contribute to regional security and stability. In my meetings with local and regional authorities, I also discussed the need to strengthen local and regional government as a means of reinforcing democracy and democratic reforms. Finally, I discussed intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the preservation of cultural patrimony and the contribution of religious organisations to the work of the Council of Europe with Metropolitan Agafangel.


This conference, organised by the Russian Federation in conjunction with the Council of Europe, brought together some 300 government representatives, experts and leading figures from religious communities all across Europe.

I should like to thank the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers for having organised this conference on a crucial topic of our times which, unfortunately, still receives too little attention from politicians.

In my address, I recalled that PACE is an ideal and natural forum for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue as it brings together national parliamentarians from 46 member states representing the wide political, social, geographical as well as cultural and religious diversity of Europe.

In this connection, I called for churches and other confessional organisations to receive an official status with the Council of Europe. In my opinion, there is absolutely no reason why they should not officially have a status similar to that granted to non-governmental organisations, taking into account their specificities. I recalled that the Treaty of the European Union establishing a Constitution for Europe had recognised the important role of churches and religious organisations in contributing to the process of European integration.

I am convinced that the Council of Europe must reinforce its political and legal action by co-operation with confessional institutions. Through their moral and ethical commitment and the values they uphold, they are active players in civil society and valid partners in our democratic societies. We must work together for peace, social justice and long-term stability, thus severing the root causes of terrorism.

As regards the concrete fields of our co-operation, I outlined the following areas: respect for fundamental human values, family values, children’s rights, social cohesion, fighting social segregation between religious, ethnic and racial groups, encouraging integration, combating HIV/AIDS. In particular, I stressed the need to enhance human dignity by fighting poverty and exclusion.

As regards the follow-up to this conference at the Assembly level, I intend to pursue my long-term objective to offer the tribune of the Assembly to dignitaries of different religions to promote tolerance and mutual understanding.

I also invite the Committee on Culture, Science and Education to make concrete proposals as regards establishing a permanent framework for pan-European meetings with representatives of different religions and granting an official status to churches and other confessional organisations. These proposals could then be discussed with representatives of Churches and this topic could become one of the leading themes for a future part-session of the Assembly, possibly that of June 2007.

The conference was an excellent opportunity to have bilateral meetings with representatives of the main religions. I also used this occasion to meet Mr Alexander Konovalov, Plenipotentiary Representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the Volga Federal District and Mr Valeriy Shantsev, Governor of the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast.
Between 13 and 16 September 2006, I visited Kazakhstan. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all those who assisted in organising and conducting this visit to what is a non-member state of the Council of Europe, in particular the Kazakh authorities and the head of the European Commission delegation, Ambassador Adriaan van der Meer, along with Ambassador van der Tempel of the Netherlands, who hosted a working dinner.

The purpose of my visit was to participate in the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which took place in Astana. I made the first speech in the closing session of the Congress, which was attended by representatives of the Islamic, Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Shinto, Taoist and Hindu faiths, amongst others. In my speech, I urged religious leaders and democratic politicians to unite around their common values in order to provide leadership in the fight against extremism and terrorism, recalling that these values were also the basis of the Council of Europe's commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

I also held a bilateral meeting with the President of Kazakhstan, Mr Nursultan Nazarbaev, as well as separate meetings with a number of Congress participants.

In addition, I used the opportunity of my visit to hold a series of further meetings. In Astana, I met the Deputy Chairman of the Senate, Mr Kopaev, the Chairman of the Mejlis, Mr Mukhamedzhyanov, representatives of the pro-presidential political parties represented in parliament, the Human Rights Ombudsman, Mr Baikadamov, representatives of NGOs based in Astana (the Astana branch of the International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, the Women’s Association, the Union of Veterans and Invalids and “NGOs of Kazakhstan,” an umbrella group) and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Tokaev. Our talks focused on the relations between the Assembly and the Parliament of Kazakhstan and on the process of democratisation in Kazakhstan. The issue of Kazakhstan’s candidature for Chairmanship of the OSCE was also raised by most of the politicians.

I held a second series of meetings in Almaty, beginning with the leaders of the main opposition parties: Mr Tuyakbai, Chairman of the “For a Just Kazakhstan” political movement, Mr Kozhakhmetov, leader of the Alga party, Mr Baimenov, leader of the Ak-Zhol party and the only member of parliament from an opposition party (who has, in fact, refused to take up his seat in protest at the flawed elections), and Mr Zhandosov, Co-chair of the True Ak-Zhol party. These were followed by lunch with members of the diplomatic community, hosted by Ambassador van der Meer. I then met representatives of NGOs including the Almaty Helsinki Committee, Charter for Human Rights, the International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, the Republican Network of Independent Monitors and Transparency Kazakhstan. Finally, I met media representatives, including from the TV channels 31 Channel and KTK, the newspapers Panorama, Vremya and Respublica and the internet site NAVI. All these meetings focused on issues relating to democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Kazakhstan. The visit ended with a press conference.

My core message throughout was that the Assembly greatly valued its relations with the Parliament of Kazakhstan, believed that the 2004 Special Co-operation Agreement was making an important contribution to developing those relations and stood ready to continue assisting with the process of democratisation. I stressed that the content given to the relationship – in particular through personal contacts with the Kazakh delegation, its involvement in the work of the Assembly's committees and political groups, the annual report to the Bureau, the forthcoming debate on the Political Affairs Committee’s report and joint events such as the conference co-organized by the Migration Committee – was more important than its form. I also strongly encouraged Kazakhstan to enhance its cooperation with the Venice Commission (of which it is an Observer), in particular as regards the work of the National Commission on Democratic Reform, with a view to eventual membership. By implementing the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the authorities of Kazakhstan would lay the foundations for lasting stability, security, peace and prosperity.

Following my various meetings, I concluded that new impetus must be given to the reform process before Kazakhstan’s institutions of government and political system can be considered fully democratic. The main problems are constitutional, including the excessive power of
the executive branch, legislative, in particular the laws on elections and political parties, laws restricting the activities of NGOs and laws allowing excessive interference with the freedoms of expression and assembly, and administrative, including arbitrary and repressive implementation of laws and regulations against opposition political parties and critical independent media and NGOs. These problems are made worse by insufficient judicial independence and the institutional weakness of other human rights protection mechanisms, including the Ombudsman. The result is a lack of genuine plurality in Kazakhstan’s political life, since opposition politicians and critical independent media are prevented from engaging effectively with the public and thus denied the possibility of exercising political influence.

Outside the government and pro-governmental parties, most interlocutors felt that the reform process had stalled in recent years. Nevertheless, given its history and compared with its Central Asian neighbours, Kazakhstan is a very open country that exhibits a genuine desire to develop closer relations with Europe and an apparent willingness to progress towards European standards of democracy. The Assembly can play an important role in encouraging and assisting both of these tendencies. Kazakhstan should also be recognised for its harmonious inter-ethnic, intercultural and inter-religious relations and for its commitment to spreading these values, including through the Congress.

47. Working visit to Turkey (25-28 October 2006)

During my visit to Turkey from 25 to 28 October 2006 I met with representatives of Turkish authorities, civil society, trade and industry and academics.

In Ankara I had a meeting with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Gül. We spoke first of all about the main topics that concern Turkey in its relations with the Council of Europe and the European Union, namely the accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey, the current situation in the relations between Turkey and Cyprus and the efforts of the Finnish EU presidency to solve this matter, and the draft French law regarding the Armenian genocide.

I offered Minister Gül the help of the Parliamentary Assembly to improve relations between Turkey and Cyprus. Both Minister Gül and I agreed that Turkey should continue with the reforms and should not let the process be stalled by different opinions on whether Turkey should become a fully-fledged EU member, nor by the state of affairs with Cyprus.

Regarding the latter, I proposed to Minister Gül that a step-by-step approach be developed without anticipating the final outcome.

I also discussed with Minister Gül the draft law of France with regard to the Armenian genocide, a draft which does not have my support.

However I stressed that, in order to have trustworthy criticism about this law, Turkey should do its utmost to improve the national freedom of speech and expression. Therefore, I urged the Turkish government to amend article 301 of their Constitution.

During my working visit I also discussed these matters with the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr Yasar Yakis, with whom I held an in-depth dialogue, Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Chairman of the PACE Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, the Mayor of Istanbul, Mr Kadir Topbaş, the President of the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, Mr Murat Yalcintas, and representatives of the Chamber of Industry. During the last day of my visit I went to the region of Çanakkale and met with the Governor and the Provincial Council.

During the meeting at the Bilgi University in Istanbul I discussed the judiciary and legal system of Turkey, especially with regard to human rights. The University plays an important role in the training and education of judges and magistrates.

Furthermore, the academics develop several programmes to help and inform Turkish citizens regarding the legal system, their rights and duties.

My visit was widely covered by the Turkish media. This was underlined by the turnout at the press conferences as well as several television and newspaper interviews.

48. Forum for the Future of Democracy (Moscow, 18-19 October 2006)

On 18 October 2006, I spoke at the opening of the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Moscow, which was examining the role of political parties in democracy-building.
In my speech, I paid tribute to the work of assassinated journalist Anna Politkovskaya and called on the Russian authorities to carry out a thorough investigation in order to bring those responsible to justice. In this connection, I stressed the crucial importance of the freedom of media, which is one of the pillars of democracy. State authorities are responsible not only for the legal framework for journalism, but also for the general climate in which journalists are working.

My key message to the participants of the conference concentrated on the principles on which we must build political life in our countries, mainly:

1/ unconditional respect for fundamental values and freedoms in all circumstances, including the freedom of media, which is the essential public corrective mechanism of political life;

2/ having the courage to defend these values, even in cases when a majority of our citizens have a different opinion – the death penalty can be taken as an example: it is unacceptable, even if, in many countries, it still has wide support;

3/ being an example to our citizens, both in private and public life, as regards the essential human values of integrity, honesty and compassion;

4/ competing with our ideas and programmes in fair and free elections;

5/ respecting the diversity of political opinions and respecting the opposition;

6/ staying close to civil society, which is systematically providing new ideas and constructive criticism.

I also stressed the need for party-building at a ‘transnational level’, because if political issues go global, political parties cannot afford not to.

Furthermore, I used this occasion to outline the main principles on which the future Forum meetings must be based:

1/ the Forum needs to bring together the widest possible variety of parties with a real and immediate interest: civil society, journalists, academics, politicians and political parties, civil servants, and so on. There must be a proper balance between these groups, in order to achieve genuine, pluralistic representation of society as a whole;

2/ the Forum must not duplicate the work of the Council of Europe’s existing organs and mechanisms, namely the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Liaison Committee for the international NGOs that enjoy participatory status.

In this connection, I suggested that the Parliamentary Assembly should make an evaluation of the first two Forum meetings and take a new initiative with a view to fully developing the great potential of the Forum idea.

On the occasion of my participation, I also:

1/ held bilateral meetings with Mr Gryzlov, Speaker of the State Duma, and Mr Lavrov, Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation;

2/ met Mr Konoplev, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Belarus, to discuss my possible visit to Minsk;

3/ held an exchange of views with students at the Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics and Informatics (MESI);

4/ visited the region of Vladimir and met with the regional authorities, regional representatives of political parties, NGO representatives and journalists.

49. Working visit to Slovakia
(9-10 November 2006)

On 9-10 November 2006, I held meetings in the Slovak National Council in Bratislava with Mr Pavol Paska, Speaker, Mr Boris Zala, Chairman of the parliamentary delegation to PACE, representatives of the political groups and committees.

This visit took place at the invitation of Mr Paska following the statement made by the Bureau of the Assembly on 6 September 2006 calling on the Slovak government to take a firmer stand against the use of racist or xenophobic discourse in politics and in society.

During my meetings, I again called upon Slovak parliamentarians to show no tolerance for any manifestation of racism and xenophobia and brought to mind that respect for difference and diversity lies at the heart of the values defended by the Council of Europe and that ensuring such respect in practice is an unconditional duty for all member states.
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Both the Speaker and members of the National Council fully supported my position. However, they recalled that it must be enforced in the same way in all member states to avoid double standards.

Among other issues, I asked for support in the current negotiation process between the Council of Europe and the EU in order to avoid duplication of activities and waste of money.

I also met Mr Jan Kubis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, to discuss a large range of issues including relations with the European Union, Belarus, Central Asia, the need for a strategic partnership with Russia and the next chairmanship of Slovakia of the Committee of Ministers.

In the framework of this visit, I also addressed the conference "10th dialogue with the Orthodox Church" organised by the European People’s Party and the European Democrat Group of the European Parliament. I reiterated my call for churches to be given an official status with the Council of Europe, recalling that Patriarch Bartholomew I would address the Parliamentary Assembly at its Winter part-ses-sion (Strasbourg, 22-26 January 2007).

50. Launch of the campaign against domestic violence (Madrid, 27 November 2006)

In Madrid, I attended and addressed the launch- ing conference of the Council of Europe cam- paign to combat violence against women, includ- ing domestic violence.

In my speech, I focused on the need for all actors – governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities and representatives of the civil society – to act in unison to combat violence against women, including domestic violence.

I stressed the need for measures to be taken to draft and implement legislation to combat domestic violence but also to make better use of the education systems and the media and infor-mation technologies in order to change people’s attitudes.

I also highlighted action undertaken by the Parliamentary Assembly, in particular the Assembly campaign “Parliaments united in combating domestic violence against women”, and stressed that parliamentarians can play a vital role by:

- adopting legislation to establish domestic vio- lence as a serious and unacceptable assault on human dignity and a violation of human rights;
- adopting legislation that prosecutes and punishes the perpetrators, protects the most vulnerable individuals and reinforces the rights of victims;
- ensuring that our states respect international norms and standards, in particular those deri-ving from the European Convention on Human Rights;
- putting the issue on the political agenda of our parliaments and treating it as a core issue affect- ing human rights and of the functioning of democratic societies.

On the margins of the Conference I met with Prime Minister Zapatero and other government Ministers. I congratulated Mr Zapatero on the work of the Alliance of Civilizations, an initia-tive Prime Minister Zapatero co-chairs with the Prime Minister of Turkey Mr Erdogan.

I told Prime Minister Zapatero that intercultural and inter-religious dialogue are one of the priori-ties of the Parliamentary Assembly’s work and my work as President. In this connection, I invited the Prime Minister to address the Assembly during one of its forthcoming part-sessions in 2007.

51. Official visit to Germany (28 November-1 December 2006)

I visited Berlin, Germany, between 28 November and 1 December 2006. During my visit, I met several representatives (on various levels) of the German authorities and of different academic institutions. These included the spokespersons dealing with the Council of Europe of all the political groups in the Bundestag, the Committee on European Affairs, the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Human Rights. I also briefly attended the plenary session of the Bundestag during its annual debate on human rights. The president of the Bundestag expressed the Bundestag’s support for the Council of Europe’s campaign against domestic violence.

In addition, I had meetings with the Head of the Federal Chancellery, the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, the State Secretary of Economics and technology and the State Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs. During
my tête-à-tête with Chancellor Merkel I invited her to address the Parliamentary Assembly during Germany’s Presidency of the EU, in the first half of 2007.

I also met with members of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, representatives of the German Institute for Human Rights and the German Human Rights Commissioner. On the second day of my visit I had lunch with the German delegation to the PACE, with almost the entire delegation present.

During all these meetings a range of different topics was discussed, including the forthcoming German Presidency of the EU, the EU’s accession negotiations with Turkey, the bilateral relations of the EU and Germany with Russia and the Fundamental Rights Agency. As regards the latter, both the German government and both members and committees of the Bundestag were very critical of the EU’s proposals. In particular, the need to avoid duplication of the activities of the Council of Europe was underlined by all interlocutors. More generally, the specific role of the Council of Europe in relations with non EU-countries – mainly through strengthened dialogue – was also stressed.

The content and quality of the various meetings contributed to a very successful working visit. Finally, I would also like to express my thanks to the German Bundestag for their excellent organisation of the visit.

52. Forum on “The Future of Europe” (European Parliament, Brussels, 4-5 December 2006)

On 4-5 December 2006, I participated in the capacity of President of PACE in the Joint Parliamentary Meeting on “The Future of Europe,” co-organised by the European Parliament and the Parliament of Finland. The meeting was chaired by Josep Borrell Fontelles, President of the European Parliament, and Paavo Lipponen, Speaker of the Finnish Parliament; the plenary session was introduced by José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, and Matti Vanhanen, Prime Minister of Finland.

On the first day I participated in the Working Group on “The European Union’s role in conflict prevention”, during which I made an intervention emphasising the importance of the role of the Council of Europe and urging the European Union to co-operate closely with other regional organisations in order to ensure that European states contributed to conflict prevention on a basis of equality, without division arising from the differing membership of various organisations. This point was subsequently included in the conclusions presented to the plenary meeting by the Rapporteur for the working group. I also took the opportunity of holding informal bilateral meetings with other participants from both the European Parliament and national parliaments.

53. Working visit to Moscow (10-13 January 2007)

During this visit, I met Speakers of the State Duma and the Federation Council, Mr Boris Gryzlov and Mr Sergey Mironov, as well as Foreign Minister Mr Sergey Lavrov, His Holiness Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and All Russia, the Russian delegation to PACE, representatives of human rights NGOs and journalists of “Novaya Gazeta”, the newspaper of Anna Politkovskaya.

Furthermore, I met Mr Paul Vandoren, Deputy Head of Delegation of the European Commission to Russia, together with Ambassadors of Germany, Portugal and Finland representing the EU Presidency “troika”.

I also had an exchange of views with students at the Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO)

I concentrated on the following main issues:

1/ Role of the Council of Europe, as a pan-European organisation based on common values, in building a strategic partnership with Russia

I underlined, in particular, the need to build our relations on equal footing and without double standards as well as the need to strengthen the human dimension of our co-operation – we need more “people to people” contacts, in particular in the fields of culture, research, sport and education.

2/ Role of the Council of Europe as a unique platform for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue

During my meeting with Patriarch Alexis II, I stressed the need to offer to churches and confessional organisations an official status with the Council of Europe. The Patriarch also accepted the invitation to address the Assembly.

During my meetings, in particular, with Mr Gryzlov, Speaker of the State Duma, as well as with the press, I underlined the absolute necessity to ratify Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights. Mr Gryzlov described the current stage, following the negative vote in December, as a “study period”, during which the Duma’s competent committee will continue to consider the matter in order to decide whether and, if so, when it should be submitted again to a vote. He underlined that more than a half of the Duma members did not take part in the December vote. In this connection, Mr Gryzlov said that he would welcome more information and explanations from the Council of Europe on the questions raised in the Duma in connection with the ratification.

4/ Implementation of the law on NGOs

I met representatives of the following NGOs: Amnesty International, Stichting Russian Justice Initiative, International Protection Centre, Centre Demos, Memorial – Human Rights Institute, Moscow Helsinki Group, Civic Assistance.

The main issue was the implementation of the law on NGOs. I was told that even though no NGO has been closed down so far as a direct consequence of the law, it has led to a substantial increase of the administrative burden for NGOs, many of which, in particular in the regions, cannot cope. It was also underlined that the law was open to subjective interpretation by the authorities. Furthermore, the law must be looked at in connection with the existing tax and anti-terrorist legislation, which adds additional pressure on the NGOs.

NGOs representatives have called on the Council of Europe to make an evaluation of the implementation of the law and I fully supported this request.

5/ Freedom of media

At my meeting with Novaya Gazeta, I was told that the editorial management was so far satisfied with the efforts of the authorities to investigate the murder of Anna Politkovskaya. I recalled my firm stand that, for me, attacking journalists means attacking democracy and called on the authorities to intensify the investigation.

6/ Relations between Russia and Georgia

I repeated my calls to abstain from any measures which could aggravate the conflict, and to take gradual concrete steps to ease tensions and restore mutual confidence. Such steps could include, for example, opening some channels of communication between the two countries (possibly a border crossing, or a flight connection, or the mail services).

7/ Belarus

All my interlocutors considered that my visit to Belarus on 18-20 January 2007 was a good and necessary political initiative.

54. Working visit to London (15 January 2007)

In the course of a brief visit to London, I attended a round-table meeting at Chatham House (the Royal Institute of International Affairs), followed by a bilateral meeting with Mr Geoff Hoon, Minister of State for Europe.

During my meeting at Chatham House, attended by a range of high-level experts including Mr Robin Niblett, the new Director, Dr Rosemary Hollis, the Director of Research, Mr Julian Borger, the new diplomatic editor of The Guardian newspaper and Mr William Horsley, correspondent of the BBC World Service, I gave a broad introduction to the work of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly in particular, followed by a presentation of my positions concerning relations with the European Union, Russia and Turkey. The participants were especially interested in my recent working visit to Moscow, with lively exchanges focussing on the issues of energy supply, media freedom and the NGO law.

With Mr Hoon, our discussions also focused on policy towards Russia, including the State Duma’s recent failure to ratify Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights, along with the UK’s attitude towards the Council of Europe. I strongly urged the UK to ensure that both member states and the European Union made much more use of the added value of the Council of Europe. I also questioned whether the UK’s attitude during recent negotiations on the Council of Europe’s budget was consistent with genuine commitment to the organisation or with its earlier campaign to have its candidate elected Secretary General. I recalled that the UK had recently supported the creation of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, which would unnecessarily and wastefully duplicate Council of Europe activities, and pointed out that €30m of its budget would resolve all of the Council of Europe’s
financial problems. Mr Hoon assured me of the UK’s continuing commitment, pleading that general budgetary stringency had made it impossible for his ministry to adopt a more generous position. I also called on the UK to support implementation of the recommendations of the Juncker Report and finalisation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

55. Meeting with Mrs Catherine Colonna, French Minister for Europe (Strasbourg, 16 January 2007)

On 16 January 2006, I met French Minister for Europe Catherine Colonna.

I highlighted the budget problems faced by our organisation, in particular the reluctance of the “big contributors” to increase their budgetary contributions. In this respect I recalled that France, the host country of the Council of Europe, has a particular obligation towards our organisation and its budgetary needs.

We discussed the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, in particular the need to co-ordinate and co-operate in order to avoid duplication of activities already carried out in a very efficient way by the Council of Europe institutions and mechanisms.

We also discussed the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union and the follow-up to the Juncker report on the relationship between the two institutions.

Our discussions also included relations with Russia and Belarus.

56. Election of the President of the European Parliament (Strasbourg, 16 January 2007)


In his speech, President Pöttering referred to the very good co-operation between the European Parliament and the PACE and officially welcomed me to the inauguration ceremony:

“Dear colleagues, I am delighted that the President of an institution that has done so much for Europe’s values and will continue to do so, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, with which we wish to co-operate successfully, Mr René van der Linden, is here with us in the European Parliament today. A warm welcome to you, René van der Linden!”

57. Working visit to Belarus (Minsk, 18-20 January 2007)

At the invitation of Mr Vladimir Konoplev, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Mr Gennady Novitsky, Chairman of the Council of the Republic, I visited Minsk on 18-20 January 2007.

The objective of this visit was:

1/ to engage in a dialogue with the authorities, the opposition and civil society - including students - with a view to encouraging democratic developments and promoting Council of Europe values in the country;

2/ to address the main concerns of the Parliamentary Assembly with regard to Belarus, including the functioning of the opposition, free and fair elections, imprisonment for allegedly political reasons, freedom of expression and the death penalty;

3/ to discuss areas and methods of possible concrete assistance programmes to Belarus

With one exception, I was able to hold all the meetings which I had asked for, including with the political opposition leaders, led by Mr Milinkievich, representatives of civil society and leaders of the Orthodox and Catholic churches. On the official side, I met, in particular, both Speakers, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Martynov, and the Minister of Culture, Mr Vladimir Matveichuk. Furthermore, I met the diplomatic representatives of the Council of Europe member states in Minsk.

I also addressed students at the Belarusian State University and held a very open and frank exchange of views with them.

I was not able to meet Mr Kozulin, candidate in the last presidential elections, currently in prison for, in my opinion, political reasons. However, I met the wife of Mr Kozulin and obtained assurances from Speaker Konoplev that the Ambassador of Germany in Minsk, Mr
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Hecker, will be able to visit Mr Kozulin in the near future.

Concluding the visit, I called for positive steps to re-start co-operation with Belarus and end its isolation. In my opinion there was more willingness now on the part of the authorities to move closer to European structures, in particular the Council of Europe and the European Union.

I said that I was in favour of starting a dialogue with Belarus but that this must be based on respect for and the implementation of Council of Europe values, such as the freedom of expression, the organisation of free and fair elections and the abolition of the death penalty.

I stressed that this dialogue must be accompanied by concrete steps by the authorities, indicating that they are willing to move in the direction of the Council of Europe values. In this respect, I insisted, in particular, on the necessity to free Mr Kozulin and all those considered to be imprisoned for political reasons.

I also underlined that a strong opposition is needed in every country to ensure the proper functioning of the political system as well as a strong civil society, and called for greater dialogue among all the political forces.

At the meeting with the political opposition, including Alexander Milinkievich, all opposition representatives welcomed my visit to Minsk. They agreed that it was a good moment for a high-level political visit and considered it a positive step for promoting democratic development. They reiterated their position that the state of democracy and human rights in Belarus is worsening and underlined that any dialogue with the authorities should be result-oriented.

I proposed that the following concrete measures be discussed as possible future steps to promote Council of Europe values in Belarus, facilitate dialogue and intensify people-to-people contact:

- to send international experts to make an independent assessment of whether alleged political prisoners in Belarus should be considered as such;
- to open a Council of Europe office in Minsk, as called for by the Assembly;
- to make use of existing Council of Europe mechanisms, such as the Venice Commission, to propose possible changes to bring Belarusian legislation into line with Council of Europe standards;
- to intensify the promotion of exchanges between students in Belarus and other European countries and push for simplifying visa procedures to enable such exchanges.

58. 3rd World Congress against the Death Penalty (Paris, 1 February 2007)

I addressed the opening session of the Third World Congress against the Death Penalty. In my speech, I pointed out that the Assembly did not consider its achievement in making the Council of Europe a death penalty-free zone to be the conclusion of its work; we continued to argue for abolition on the world stage, in particular in our observer states the US and Japan, suspended special guest state Belarus and in Kazakhstan, with whom the Assembly has a cooperation agreement. I also informed participants that we would be debating the Italian initiative in the UN for a universal moratorium at our Standing Committee meeting in Paris on 16 March.

59. Conference on the parliamentary dimension of election observation (Strasbourg, 15-16 February 2007)

Conclusions of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly

• The high-level and wide geographical scope of participation in and the intensity of the debate at this Conference testify to the timeliness and importance of this initiative.

• The focus was two-fold: election observation and the parliamentary dimension thereof.

• Conclusions and recommendations in an election observation report of an observing delegation gain additional weight if they are shared by other observer bodies; there is a clear complementarity of long-term and short term, political and technical observation; by the same token, conflicting conclusions undermine the credibility of the observation and create conditions conducive to forum-shopping by the observed.

• While not a precise science, election observation has certain underlying principles based on standards used.
• The discussion revealed that members of the observer community, no matter which part of the world they are from, have at their disposal standards that have a lot in common as reflected in such instruments as the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Copenhagen Document. These instruments are only binding on those states that signed up to or ratified them.

• In the OSCE area, the Copenhagen document fully retains its validity. The principles of transparency, accountability and public confidence should be upheld at all times.

• It was further noted that the existing standards constitute a solid basis for a proper assessment of the process; it was generally felt that the elaboration of new standards should not be an immediate task for the observer community, although some participants spoke in favour of this.

• A stricter and more uniform application of common standards is definitely the order of the day as the application of these standards is far from even, leading on occasions to conflicting assessments. In this context, measures to enhance observers’ knowledge and awareness of standards should be encouraged.

• In this sense, this Conference has allowed us to see where we stand, which could result in assessments that will be in a better concert than they sometimes are today.

• The same standards need to be applied at all levels (national, regional, local) to ensure consistency.

• Speakers stressed that there is a need for a credible methodology and timely and accurate reporting.

• It was considered crucial that findings must be clear and linked to standards and the use of terminology should be unambiguous.

• From our two days of discussions it transpired that there exists, albeit informally, a de facto International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) which includes PACE, the European Parliament and the OSCE PA, which, together with the OSCE ODIHR, as a matter of standard practice co-ordinate their activities and findings in the field and issue joint statements at joint press conferences.

• This practice, which has proved its validity over time, should continue in the future and may be enhanced and further refined through a more formal arrangement between the parties concerned.

• Members of the current loose arrangement may wish to consider if this arrangement is open to observer delegations from like-minded institutions who subscribe to and implement the same standards; this is increasingly the case, for example, when the NATO Assembly joins in the observation.

• The question of how to associate IPA CIS with international observation missions was raised. This is an issue for further reflection.

• Participants were in agreement that the input of parliamentarians, i.e. people with independent judgement who have first-hand experience and a sound knowledge of what an election should be, is a great added value; parliamentarians know a good election when they see one. Parliamentarians are well placed to ensure post-election dialogue.

• Election observation genuinely benefits from its parliamentary component and adds real political weight to the findings.

• Participants underscored the need for a better political and gender balance in observation missions.

• Participants further agreed that election observation is a co-operative exercise involving all players who, based on their comparative advantages, mutually reinforce one another. Since parliamentarians are wanted in their respective parliaments or constituencies, they are not in a position to ensure a long-term presence, allowing observing also during the run-up to the actual voting and the electoral campaign.

• This is where non-parliamentary observers, including domestic observers and civil society, come into play. Their contribution is indispensable and most valuable in view of the fact that it is difficult to isolate elections completely from the national political context.

• We should also make full use of the expertise and the experience of former members of parliaments, whose willingness to join in the observation process is most commendable.

• Participants referred to the Declaration of Principles and Code of Conduct, as endorsed by
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29 organisations and institutions, which provide a global framework for election observation.

- It was acknowledged that new forms of distance voting, including e-voting, raise a number of questions and challenges for the observer community. PACE stands ready to initiate reflections on this matter.

- Participants acknowledged there is a need for an internationally-recognised status of election observers which could then be embodied in domestic legislation. PACE stands ready to initiate this process.

- An observation only makes sense if the observed pay heed to the findings. Participants were very much interested to hear comments from electoral administrators about how they view election observation reports and how they take them into account in future exercises.

- The debate revealed the need for a post-electoral dialogue and assistance programmes to put findings and the conclusions of election observation missions onto a practical plane.

- As far as follow-up is concerned, in PACE there exists already a specific procedure for monitoring commitments of member states and such recommendations are fed into that process. This is a good practice that might well inspire others.

- For election observation to maintain credibility the application of sanctions should be systematically considered and, in case of serious shortcomings, applied.

- The broad consultation on election observation launched by this conference should continue. I could imagine similar conferences, or smaller target-oriented workshops, with a more focused agenda, to be held annually and involving partner institutions.

- Partners in the IEOM may wish to give further thought to streamlining their co-operation through more formal arrangements aimed at providing a better framework to the existing practices, ensuring equality of all members of an IEOM and promoting a more uniform application of existing standards. PACE stands ready to come forward with specific proposals.

60. Official visit to Cyprus (18-22 February 2007)

At the invitation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, I conducted an official visit to the Republic of Cyprus between 19 and 22 February. The stated purpose of my visit was to promote dialogue and reconciliation by using the human dimension and parliamentary diplomacy to encourage steps, whether large or small, that could contribute to bringing the two communities together.

With this goal in mind, I was therefore very pleased that all the “bicomunal” meetings I had suggested could take place: representatives of civil society; the leaders of political parties; the mayors of the southern and northern parts of Nicosia, Mrs Eleni Mavrou and Mr Cemal Bulutoglu, whose existing co-operation on issues such as waste management set an excellent example; and the two communities’ religious leaders, Archbishop Chrysostomos II and Director of Religious Affairs Mr Ahmet Yonluer. These latter two meetings were particularly rewarding, as it was the first time the respective participants had met; indeed, the meeting between the religious leaders was the first such since 1974.

In addition, the Cypriot delegation hosted a working lunch, which was also, at my suggestion, attended by Mr Özdil Nami, one of the two elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community who participate in Assembly activities.

These meetings produced immediate and encouraging results. For example, the party leaders agreed to begin working together on implementing the 8 July 2006 agreement signed by President Papadopoulos and Mr Talat; and the religious leaders issued a very positive, forward-looking joint statement containing proposals for concrete follow-up on issues such as ensuring respect for and enabling the use of places of worship. In the context of the priority I give as President to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the outcome of the religious leaders’ meeting was particularly welcome.

I also held a series of bilateral meetings with leading political figures, including President Tassos Papadopoulos, Mr Demetris Christofias, President of the House of Representatives, Mr Yiorgos Lillikas, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Akis Kleanthous, Minister for Education and Culture (who had been appointed earlier in the same day that I met him) and Mr Mehmet Ali Talat, Leader of
the Turkish Cypriot community, whom I met in his offices in the northern part of Nicosia.

Furthermore, I met Mr Michael Moller, Chief of the UN Mission and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, and members of the diplomatic community in Cyprus. I was given a guided tour of the buffer zone at Nicosia by members of the UN peacekeeping force and also visited the point where Ledra Street crosses the green line.

During my meetings, I addressed six main themes:

• implementation of the 8 July agreement, which had not yet reached the first stage of agreement on topics to be discussed by working groups;

• immediate opening of the Ledra Street crossing of the Green Line: everyone I met was in favour of this (including local residents and shopkeepers, who handed me a letter on the issue), but the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion and distrust was preventing progress;

• support by Cypriot politicians for a free and active civil society: civil society representatives complained to me that, following the referendum on the Annan Plan, many had been subject to unjustified criticism and attacks;

• progressive integration of universities in the northern part of Cyprus into the Bologna process, on the basis that education and international contacts would help the process of understanding and reconciliation;

• respect for cultural heritage, including places of worship, in both parts of the island;

• improving sporting, youth and higher educational contacts between the two communities.

I continually emphasised the need to identify specific, practical issues of common interest on which the two communities could co-operate. I urged the two communities’ leaders to show more flexibility: neither the fact of having voted “yes” in the referendum on the Annan Plan, nor membership of the European Union, would allow any side to avoid the need to make concessions. In particular, there was an urgent need to resume the process of confidence-building that had begun prior to the referendum on the Annan Plan; in this respect, it was vital for both sides to honour any signs of trust or goodwill shown by the other. The press release issued at the conclusion of the visit encapsulated this message by calling on both sides to turn the buffer zone from a symbol of division into a symbol of co-operation.

My visit concluded with a televised interview with the Cypriot Broadcasting Corporation; I also gave interviews to Turkish NTV television and to various other broadcast and published news media.

Following my visit, I wrote letters to those I had met. I again encouraged President Papadopoulos and Mr Talat to reach agreement on opening the Ledra Street crossing, which had seemed easily achievable given a little political courage, trust and goodwill. I also now intend to organise a meeting, during a forthcoming plenary session, of the Cypriot delegation and the elected representatives of the Turkish Cypriot community, to be attended also by the delegations of Greece and Turkey.

Finally, I thanked the President of the House of Representatives for his assistance and hospitality, along with all those others who helped organise the visit, including in particular Mr Moller and his staff at UNFICYP.

61. European Parliament hearing on “establishing a Community code on visas”
(Brussels, 28 February 2007)

I addressed this hearing, which was co-organised by the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Assembly’s Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population. In my speech, I called for a visa-free European continent as a long-term goal of European visa policy, noting how, from the perspective of the pan-European Council of Europe, EU enlargement risked creating new dividing lines in Europe. I also urged the simplification of visa procedures, in particular so as to intensify student exchanges with countries such as Belarus.

62. Working visit to Brussels (8 March 2007)

I was in Brussels on 8 March 2007 to attend and participate in the meeting “The future of the European Constitutional Treaty: how to overcome the deadlock?”. Other participants in the meeting were also former members of the European Convention on the future of Europe, Mr Elmar Brok, Mr Mendez de Vigo and Mr Alain Lamassoure. Furthermore, Mr Saryusz-Wolski,
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the new Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, and Mr József Szájer, the Vice-President of the European People’s Party group, attended the meeting.

I was invited to be the first speaker. The main points of my contribution were:

- The uniqueness of the European constitutional treaty: it was the first time that a Treaty was drafted bottom-up instead of the usual top-down approach; involvement of civil society, parliaments, cultural and religious representatives.

- The answers for the challenges that Europe faces in the nearby future (energy, terrorism, cross-border problems) can be found in the European Constitutional Treaty. Therefore we must safeguard the core of the current texts.

- Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are common principles that helped build the EU. We must make better use of those values in winning back the trust of our citizens.

- Besides (re)convincing our citizens we need a new set of rules. We need the necessary parts of the European Constitutional Treaty.

In the afternoon I participated in the EPP Statutory Summit of Heads of State and Governments and Opposition Leaders. During that summit we discussed, among other things, the European challenge of sufficient energy supply, the European Declaration of Berlin and the upcoming European Council. In the margin of the summit I spoke with several government leaders.

63. Seminar “What is Europe lacking?” (Florence, 22 March 2007) and ceremony to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome (Rome, 23 March 2007)

I attended the ceremony to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaties in Rome on 23 March and a seminar “What is Europe lacking?” in Florence in the evening.

On that occasion, I pointed out that civil society is often closer to European citizens than some of the politicians and therefore needs to be better involved in European politics.

I also expressed my firm conviction that we must avoid the creation of new dividing lines in Europe. Constructive co-operation and dialogue with those European countries that are not EU members, but an important part of the European continent, is more necessary than ever. Such co-operation, as a matter of priority, should be based on the three Council of Europe pillars - human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Finally, I made a plea for stronger involvement of national parliaments in the field of European policies and warned against using the EU for domestic electoral purposes.

64. European People’s Party Summit (Berlin, 24-25 March 2007)

I attended the European People’s Party Extraordinary Summit organized in Berlin on 24 March 2007 on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome.

Over 60 participants - nine Heads of Government, the Presidents of European People’s Party member parties, the President of the European Parliament Hans-Gert Pöttering and the Vice-President of the European Commission Franco Frattini - participated in this meeting, which was hosted by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and chaired by EPP President Wilfried Martens.

65. Award ceremony for the “Premio Mediterraneo Istituzione 2007” of the “Fondazione Mediterraneo” (Naples, 30 March 2007)

At a ceremony in Naples (Italy) on 30 March 2007, I received the “Premio Mediterraneo Instituzioni” (Mediterranean Prize for Institutions) 2007 Award of the Fondazione Mediterraneo, the Euro-Mediterranean Network for Cultural and Social Dialogue. The Foundation put forward the following motivations for the attribution of the award: “By his contribution and his political action, he propagated the values of dialogue in the Greater Mediterranean area. He encouraged Euro-Mediterranean politics, especially in order to defend human rights, democracy and equality, at first as President of a European People’s Party and then as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Amongst the personalities who have received the award in its different categories are the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğăn,
the Queen of Jordan Rania Al-Abdullah and the Egyptian novelist and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature Naguib Mahfouz.

In my speech, I stressed the need for political and parliamentary dialogue between the two shores of the Mediterranean in order to face the multiple and complex challenges that are concentrated in this area. I highlighted the role of the Assembly in the promotion of peace, democratic stability and sustainable development in the Mediterranean.

During the visit to Naples, together with Claudio Azzolini, Member of the Board of Directors of the Fondazione Mediterraneo, I met Cardinal Crescenzio Sepe. I also addressed the annual youth gathering, bringing together some 20 000 participants.

**66. Meeting with His Eminence Cardinal T. Bertone, State Secretary (Vatican, 2 April 2007)**

On the occasion of my meeting with Cardinal State Secretary Tarcisio Bertone, who is in charge of the Holy See’s political and diplomatic activities, I reiterated my invitation to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to address the Parliamentary Assembly at one of its forthcoming plenary sessions.

I also detailed my proposal to grant Churches official status with the Council of Europe and pointed out that the Council of Europe’s legal and political action should be strengthened through such co-operation. From this perspective, I stressed in particular:

- the role of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue as the only way of ensuring long-term peace and stability in Europe and the rest of the world;

- the personal contribution of religious leaders to the promotion of tolerance, respect and solidarity and the role of Churches and other religious organisations as active components of civil society, and responsible partners in our democratic societies;

- the potential of the Council of Europe as the best forum for discussion of the role of religion in society;

- the importance for Churches to have a tribune to express their opinion on value issues in a value community such as the Council of Europe.

**67. Working visit to Jakarta, Indonesia (27-28 April 2007), and 116th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Denpasar, 29 April-2 May 2007)**

Prior to my participation at the 116th IPU Assembly, I held meetings in Jakarta on matters in the field of competence of the Council of Europe, mainly as regards Indonesian national mechanisms of human rights protection, the fight against corruption, the death penalty, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and development aid for human rights and good governance programmes.

In this connection, I met, in particular: the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, Chairman and members of the “Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights”, Chairman and members of the “Corruption Eradication Commission”, Executive Director and Chairman of the Governing Board of the “Indonesian Partnership for Governance Reform”, representatives of “Kommunitas Indonesia untuk Demokrasi” (human rights association).

In my speech at the 116th IPU Assembly (full text on “http://assembly.coe.int”), I underlined the following points:

- on the issue of climate change, chosen as the subject of the general debate, I stressed that we needed the political will to take some crucial decisions in order to change the current mentalities of energy consumption (both at state level and in the minds of our citizens), invest in research and development of energy technologies and not to exclude any option as regards possible sources of energy, including nuclear energy;

- regarding the issues chosen for consideration in the Standing Committees, I concentrated on respect for other’s people beliefs through intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, respect for the will of people expressed through free and fair elections and respect for fundamental human rights in the fight against terrorism.

On this occasion I held, in particular, the following meetings:

- with a delegation of the Senior Advisory Council of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA), comprising Speakers or Vice-Speakers of Iran (current Chairman of the APA), Bangladesh,
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Cambodia, Indonesia, Pakistan and Thailand. The APA confirmed its great interest in continuing to receive expertise from PACE on the functioning of its structures and expressed willingness to visit Strasbourg during the October 2007 part-session with a delegation of APA Speakers or Vice-Speakers (such a visit took place already in 2005).

- with a view to preparing my official visit to the Middle East in July 2007 (Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the territories under the control of the Palestinian Authority), I met the Speaker of the People’s Assembly of Egypt, the Speaker of the House of Representatives of Jordan, the Deputy Speaker of the Palestine National Council and the Deputy Speaker of the Palestine Legislative Council. Unfortunately, the delegation of the Knesset did not take part in this IPU Assembly. All interlocutors expressed their keen interest in receiving the PACE President and expressed great appreciation for the political forum provided by the Assembly for discussing Middle East issues.

Among other meetings, I should like to mention, in particular, those with the Speaker of the Senate of Kazakhstan, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Council of the Republic of Belarus and representatives of the Turkish Cypriot Community. I met, of course, Mr Cassini, President of the IPU.

68. Participation in the Charlemagne Prize Forum and award ceremony for the prize (Aachen, 16-17 May 2007)

I took part in the European discussion forum which precedes the annual award of the Charlemagne Prize for distinguished service on behalf of European unification, going this year to EU Foreign Policy High Representative Javier Solana. Other participants included European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering, former President Pat Cox and Croatian President Stjepan Mesić.

69. Official visit to Ukraine (20-22 May 2007)

The objective of my visit was to encourage the parties to continue trying to find common ground to defuse the current political crisis, including an agreement on a future election and further constitutional reforms, as recommended by the Assembly in its resolution last month, and to use strictly legitimate, constitutional and peaceful means of solving the crisis.

During the visit, I held meetings with President Viktor Yushchenko, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, Parliamentary Speaker Oleksandr Moroz, representatives of all parliamentary factions, the parliamentary delegation to PACE, NGO representatives and religious leaders (leaders of the Orthodox Church, Greco-Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Church, the Rabbi of Kiev, the Mufti of Ukraine as well as the Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom). I also met the Ambassadors of Serbia (Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers), Germany and Portugal (current and next Presidency of the European Council), the Netherlands, Slovakia (for NATO), the United States and a representative of the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine.

At the press conference held after these meetings, as well as during my interviews on Ukrainian TV channels, I called on Ukrainian politicians to demonstrate their sense of responsibility for the future of the country and urgently find a clear political solution to the current crisis, or risk losing their credibility in the eyes of both Ukrainians and the international community. I underlined that my role was not to judge who is right or wrong, but to help find a solution which meets the needs of Ukraine, a full member of the European family, and its people.

I welcomed the fact that contacts between the political forces represented in the Parliament had resumed in the framework of a Joint Working Group, but stressed that these rather technical contacts should lead, as soon as possible, to a fully-fledged political dialogue at the highest level in order to find a clear solution based on the rule of law.

I congratulated all sides that they had not allowed the conflict to result in confrontation on the streets and continued to uphold basic democratic freedoms such as freedom of expression and assembly.

I offered the assistance of the Council of Europe – and in particular its Parliamentary Assembly – in providing assistance to reach this much-needed political solution. I called on all parties to seek the advice of the Council of Europe’s constitutional law experts, the Venice Commission.

After the visit, I was pleased to learn that an agreement was reached between Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and the country’s Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovych, on the hol-
ding of parliamentary elections on 30th September 2007. I stressed that the Assembly has already taken a decision in principle to send a very strong delegation to observe these elections.

70. Official visit to Serbia and participation in the Standing Committee (Belgrade, 23 May 2007)

On the occasion of Serbia's six-month chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, I made an official visit to the country on 23 May, followed by a meeting of the PACE Standing Committee on 24 May. I had meetings with Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica, Foreign Affairs Minister and Chairman-in-office of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Vuk Jeremić and the President of the National Assembly Oliver Dulić. I also met the Representatives of the European Commission, the OSCE, the UN and Germany (EU Presidency) in Belgrade.

The visit took place during a very dynamic period in Serbian political life. The new Serbian government had just been formed, while the Speaker of parliament was elected during my stay in Belgrade. In a highly symbolic move, illustrative of the country's European orientation, both the Foreign Minister and Speaker made their first public, international appearance in front of the Standing Committee.

Earlier I had expressed concern over the election of Tomislav Nikolić, a leader of the Serb Radical Party, to the post of Speaker of the Serbian Parliament. Following his resignation, I warmly welcomed both the agreement on a new government and the election of Mr Dulić, as an important positive signal to the international community.

Equally during my visit, a verdict was reached in the murder of Zoran Djindjic. I welcomed this event in a press statement and expressed the hope that the government would follow Mr Djindjic's path for a democratic Serbia, fully complying with international law by extraditing Slobodan Milosevic to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.

In my speech before the Standing Committee and in my meetings with the Serbian authorities, I supported the priorities of the new government. I welcomed in particular the fact that it had clearly defined European integration as its main direction; that it had given firm assurances of its determination to co-operate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia; that it was resolved to tackle the most urgent domestic problems such as social and economic deficiencies, corruption and organised crime.

In this connexion, we reached a common understanding with the authorities that Serbia needed to fulfil the obligations and commitments that it had accepted upon accession of the Council of Europe and that the monitoring procedure of the Assembly was one of the best ways to assist the country.

On the issue of Kosovo, I repeated the Assembly's position in favour of a "negotiated and mutually accepted solution to Kosovo's status" as the best guarantee that the outcome will not be disputed in the future.

Concerning the Serbian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, I pointed out that this was a great responsibility, but also a chance and an opportunity, a way for the country to show its commitment to a value community.

During a first meeting with the Serbian Speaker after his election, which was attended also by the Vice-Speakers representing the opposition and ethnic minorities, we discussed the possibility of further parliamentary and legislative assistance to support Serbia's democratic institutions.

I extended an invitation to the Serbian President Boris Tadić to address the Assembly at his earliest convenience.

71. Working visit to Russia (St Petersburg, Moscow, Vladimir, 29 May-3 June 2007)

From 29 May to 1 June I visited St Petersburg to take part in the 28th session of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (IPU CIS), meeting on the occasion of its 15th anniversary.

I my address to the Speakers of the CIS countries, I stressed that European and pan-continental unity must be based on Council of Europe values. I underlined, in particular, the importance of the banning of the death penalty, ensuring freedom of speech, assembly and association and free and fair elections.

Finally, I expressed my firm conviction that the biggest challenge and the most important task for Europe in the next 10 to 15 years is the integration of Russia into European structures. The
success of the European continent cannot be guaranteed without a strong and profound partnership with Russia. Russia must, of course, fulfill its Council of Europe commitments and obligations, as all member states must do, but to change a power such as Russia will take time, understanding and patience.

Speaking at the International Conference on “Intercultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue” on 1 June, I stressed that inter-religious and intercultural dialogue is one of the most important issues of our times and urged politicians to pay the highest priority to this matter. Within the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly is a natural and privileged forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, given that our parliamentarians come from a wide range of societies and cultures and represent believers of all the major world religions.

We need to work together with religions to defend our shared values based on the profound respect for human life and human dignity. In this connection, I reiterated my proposal to give an official status to Churches with the Council of Europe. In my opinion, Churches and other confessional organisations, through their moral and ethical commitment and values, are active players in civil society and valid democratic partners.

On the occasion of my stay in St Petersburg, I held a series of bilateral meetings, in particular with:

- Mr Boris Gryzlov, Speaker of the Russian State Duma – we discussed, in particular, the importance of the Council of Europe for building closer relations between Russia and the rest of Europe, respect for fundamental freedoms in Russia and the relocation of the Bronze Soldier memorial in Tallinn. I expressed the hope that Russia would soon ratify Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights;
- Mr Sergey Mironov, Speaker of the Council of the Federation, Chairman of the IPA CIS – we signed a statement on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Co-operation Agreement between PACE and IPU CIS;
- Mr Vladimir Voronin, President of Moldova – we discussed, in particular, the perspectives for the solution of the Transnistrian conflict and the consequences for Moldova of the accession of Romania to the European Union;
- Mr Ogtay Asadov, Speaker of Azerbaijan – we discussed, in particular, the situation of media and NGOs in Azerbaijan, the perspectives for the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and my possible visit to the South Caucasus region later this year;
- Mrs Nino Burdjanadze, Speaker of Georgia – we discussed, in particular, the perspectives for the solution of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts, relations with Russia and my possible visit to the South Caucasus region later this year;
- Mr Kassym Tokayev, Speaker of the Senate of Kazakhstan – we discussed, in particular, the state of progress on the request by the Kazakhstan Parliament for observer status with the Assembly;
- Mr Vladimir Konoplev, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Belarus – we discussed, in particular, the state of progress on the demands and proposals which I formulated after my visit to Minsk in January 2007;
- Metropolitan Kirill, Chairman of the Department of the External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate;
- Mr Jean Lemierre, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development;
- Mrs Gertrude Mongella, President of the Pan-African Parliament;
- Mr Jorge Pizarro Soto, President of the Latin American Parliament;
- Mr Ibrahim Aauf, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Union of Islamic States.

On 2 June 2007 in Moscow, I met Mr Sergey Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister. We discussed the follow-up to the Juncker Report, the ratification of Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights, and the current state of relations between the EU and Russia, as well as matters related to relations with Estonia, Georgia, Belarus and Moldova.

On the same day, I met Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and All Russia, who confirmed his intention to come to Strasbourg to address the Assembly during the October 2007 part-session.

On 2 June, I went to Vladimir, where I met Mr Nikolay Vinogradov, Governor of the Vladimir Region, and had a speech on the occasion of the opening of the biggest investment project in this
region.

72. Opening of the “Model European Parliament” (Brussels, 4 June 2007)

At Monday 4 June I made the opening speech for the Model European Parliament of the Province of Limburg in the Netherlands. Delegations from more than twelve regional schools were participating in a conference of three days on current European policies and future challenges. In my contribution I focused on the need for commitment and ideals, especially of the younger generation, in order to make European dreams come true. Europe is a field of opportunities for young people and I delivered the message that this potential should be used to its fullest. As President of PACE, I invited a group of students to come to the plenary session of PACE in October.

73. Meetings with the Portuguese authorities and representatives of the North-South Centre (Lisbon, 8 June 2007)

I visited Portugal on 8 June to meet the President of Parliament Jaime Gama and the Foreign Minister Luís Amado, ahead of the EU Presidency that Portugal will assume in July 2007.

Discussions focused on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. The main issues that were raised were:

- the common approach and complementarity that can be found between the Council of Europe and the European Union in dealing with issues which are the core business of our organisation, in particular, human rights, democracy and rule of law, as well as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue;

- the need for Europe to move from a post-Cold War agenda towards a genuine strategic partnership with Russia. I agreed with my interlocutors that constructive dialogue and co-operation with Russia is vital, if Europe is to succeed in handling all the major challenges that it is currently facing such as, for instance, the future of Kosovo; the fight against terrorism; the crisis in the Middle East; the need to avoid nuclear proliferation; or climate change;

- the need to give a clear European perspective to the Balkans and to Turkey;

- the need to make full use of their double mandate in order to promote the values and principles of the Council of Europe – for instance, in organising a parliamentary debate on the first annual report on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe.

In the meeting with the Chairman and members of the Portuguese delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly, I encouraged them to make full use of their double mandate in order to promote the values and principles of the Council of Europe – for instance, in organising a parliamentary debate on the first annual report on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe.

I also made a working visit to the Council of Europe’s North-South Centre, during which I met the staff and was introduced to all its activities. With the President of its Executive Council Mr Claude Frey, we had extensive discussions on ways of boosting the role of the Centre, of attracting more members and of enhancing co-operation with the Assembly.

74. Working visit to Brussels (11 June 2007)

On Monday 11 June I made a working visit to Brussels. I attended the joint parliamentary meeting organised by the European Parliament and the German EU Presidency on “The Future of Europe”. After the opening of that meeting, I attended the working group on the new European Treaty, where I stated my belief that Europe should be stronger and that greater attention should be paid to the pre-conditions for European co-operation that are promoted by the Council of Europe. I stated that the instruments and procedures of the Council of Europe should be more and better used for the benefit of European integration. During the conference I held several bilateral meetings with members of the European Parliament as well as members from national parliaments.

At the beginning of the afternoon I attended the second discourse on Europe organised by the initiative “A soul for Europe”, which stands for the power of culture in the development of Europe. The debate was also attended by the President of the European Commission, Mr Barroso, the President of the European Parliament, Mr Pottering and Mr Wenders, German film director and producer. This last spoke about the “image of Europe” and concluded that the development of Europe could no longer be carried out by just economic and political means, but must come from within itself through the power of the unique diversity of its
I visited Sweden from 13 to 14 June to participate in the 3rd Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy. I took the opportunity also to hold meetings with Mr Per Westerberg, Speaker of the Riksdag, Mr Vuk Jeremic, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Serbia, Ms Nyamko Sabuni, Minister for Integration and Gender Equality of Sweden, Ms Ana Isabel Leiva Diez, State Secretary of Territorial Co-operation of Spain, Mr Göran Lennmarker, member of the Riksdag and President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Ms Inger René, chairman of the Human Rights Grouping of the Riksdag, along with other members of the Riksdag, Mr Thomas Ries, Director of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Ms Anita Klum, Secretary General of the Swedish NGO Foundation, and representatives of the Swedish Helsinki Committee. I also gave an interview to the Dagens Nyheter newspaper.

In my opening speech, I discussed how the Assembly was taking advantage of social and technological change to reinvigorate itself, using the example of the debate on our Annual Report and our pioneering work on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. I also underlined that democracy had to be above all the business of the people and their elected representatives, emphasising the central role that the Assembly played in the Forum itself.

In my meeting with Mr Westerberg, we discussed in particular the Assembly’s Annual Report, relations with Russia and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. My discussions with Mr Jeremic concentrated on the Serbian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the institutional balance within the Council of Europe and Kosovo. With Ms Sabuni, we discussed issues relating to integration, equality and the Council of Europe campaign against domestic violence. My meeting with Ms Leiva Diez focused on the Assembly’s contribution to the 4th Forum for the Future of Democracy, which will take place in Spain in 2008. With Mr Lennmarker, I discussed relations with Russia and Belarus. My discussions with Ms René and other Riksdag members covered various issues, including the Assembly’s Annual Report. My meetings with Mr Ries, Ms Klum and representatives of the Swedish Helsinki Committee addressed the role of the Council of Europe and the Assembly in protecting human rights in Europe, our relations with civil society and the Assembly’s Annual Report. My interview with Dagens Nyheter concentrated on the Forum itself, the Marty report and issues relating to the fight against terrorism, migration and relations with Turkey.

On 15 June I addressed the European Conference of the Junior Chamber International (JCI) held in Maastricht, Netherlands, from 13 to 15 June. Around 2500 members of the JCI, a worldwide federation of young leaders and entrepreneurs, attended my lecture on “European Politicians and the Future of Europe”. I spoke about the preconditions for economic prosperity and a safe continent, namely the rule of law, human rights and democracy. I emphasized the need for a solid and strengthened strategic partnership with Russia for the benefit of the European continent and I set out the need for a new European treaty to make Europe more decisive, efficient and strong – on the economic as well as the political level. After my contribution we had an interesting session of questions and answers.

On 20 June 2007, I addressed this conference held under the auspices of Cardinal Paul Poupard, President of the Holy See’s Pontifical Council for Culture, and Metropolitan Kirill, Head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations.

The subject of my address was “Political life: ethical life: the challenge”. I pointed out that the values of the Council of Europe – including tolerance and mutual respect – reflected the values of the main monotheistic religions, which have marked European spiritual identity. I underlined that the principle of a strict separation of Church and State must be respected, but our common ethical values must be reflected in the political life of our societies.

In this connection, I concentrated on three main qualities of politicians, where, I think, ethics plays a crucial role – respect for human life, respect for human dignity and honesty.

I expressed my conviction that intercultural and
inter-faith dialogue is the only way to guarantee the long-term peace and stability of Europe and the rest of the world and that politics and religion must join forces in the fight against terrorism.

Finally, I seized this opportunity to stress the necessity of strengthening cultural and religious dialogue between Russia and the rest of Europe as one of the pillars of our strategic partnership.

In the framework of the conference, I met, among others, Metropolitan Kirill, to discuss the forthcoming address of Patriarch Alexis II in the Assembly during the October part-session. I also discussed with Cardinal Paul Poupard the perspectives concerning my invitation to Pope Benedict XVI to address the Assembly.

78. Official visit to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (4-10 July 2007)

From 4 to 10 July 2007 I carried out an official visit to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This was my second visit to the three countries of the Southern Caucasus during my mandate. I visited Armenia on 4-5 July, Georgia on 5-7 July, and Azerbaijan on 8-10 July (the programme of the visit is enclosed).

I consider this region as extremely important for the Council of Europe and my main objective in returning there was to see how we can do more to solve the frozen conflicts in the countries concerned. Only this will enable the peaceful development of the region, which is in the interest of all its peoples.

Besides the role of parliamentary diplomacy in solving conflicts, I concentrated on the following questions: the rights of the opposition, freedom of expression, the role of civil society, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, relations with neighbouring countries and the building of one Europe without dividing lines.

In all three countries, I met the highest state representatives, both at executive and parliamentary levels, leaders of different political forces, including the opposition, representatives of the civil society and the media, religious leaders and Ambassadors of Council of Europe member states.

I held press conferences in Yerevan (Wednesday 4 July), Tbilisi (Saturday 7 July) and Baku (Monday 9 July).

1/ Visit to Armenia

During my meetings in Yerevan, I met, in particular, the President of Armenia, the Speaker of Parliament, leaders of the political groups in the Parliament, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, NGOs representatives and the Catholicos of All Armenians.

I stressed that utmost priority must be given to improving relations among the countries of the region as a way to necessary reconciliation and to building a new future for the younger generations. I called for compromise to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which may be painful but necessary to ensure the development of the region. I declared that open borders are a pre-condition for prosperity and that we cannot accept closed borders between Council of Europe member states.

Furthermore, I called on the Armenian authorities to use the forthcoming presidential elections to consolidate the democratic progress achieved during the recent parliamentary elections and offered the Assembly’s expertise and instruments to contribute to this process. In this connection, I stressed in particular the need to ensure that media, especially TV and radio, are truly independent and the need to continue the judicial reform. Finally, I called on all political forces represented in the Parliament, both from the majority and the opposition, to observe the democratic rules of political life and work in mutual respect for the future of their country.

2/ Visit to Georgia

During my visit, I met the President of Georgia, members of parliament both from the majority and the opposition, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and NGO representatives. On 7 July, I visited South Ossetia.

I stressed that the solution of frozen conflicts is crucial for the future development of the South Caucasus region, but that this solution must be achieved uniquely through peaceful means. Therefore, and underlining the Assembly’s position that the solution to the conflicts in Georgia must respect the principle of territorial integrity, I called on all parties to engage in a serious political dialogue in order to achieve progress. I expressed the conviction that the first pre-condition for the success of this dialogue is to stop all military confrontations and provocations and to calm current tensions.

I expressed my appreciation for the progress achieved on democratic reforms in Georgia and underlined that Council of Europe expertise and instruments have been extremely useful in this process. The Assembly’s monitoring procedure,
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in particular, is providing precious assistance and guidance to the Georgian authorities in their efforts to achieve further progress on their obligations and commitments to the Council of Europe, in particular with regard to checking and balancing the political system, election legislation, independence of the media and the justice system, and the fight against corruption.

3/ Visit to Azerbaijan

During my visit to Baku, I met the Speaker of Parliament, representatives of different political groups in the Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Foreign Minister, representatives of human rights NGOs, representatives of the opposition not represented in the Parliament and representatives of the main religions.

I stressed that lasting prosperity and sustainable development are not possible without respecting the fundamental values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. I put emphasis, in particular, on the importance of free and fair elections which are the basis of every democratic system. Therefore, I underlined that it is of the utmost importance that the 2008 presidential elections take place in accordance with Council of Europe standards and mark a striking difference to the 2005 parliamentary elections. In this connection, I urged the authorities to intensify co-operation with the Council of Europe in order to improve election legislation, in particular as regards the composition and functioning of electoral commissions and the rights of observers.

I also called on the authorities to seriously examine concerns over existing problems regarding, in particular, the freedom of demonstration, of the media, unrestricted functioning of political parties and independent justice. Necessary measures must be taken to comply with Council of Europe standards. I said that particular attention must be given to the cases of journalists in prison and other persons allegedly imprisoned for political reasons. I urged that those in bad health should be released on humanitarian grounds.

In Resolution 1416 (2005), the Assembly stated that ‘considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces’. During my visit, I came to the conclusion that, regrettably, this situation has not changed since my last visit in 2005. I therefore urged political leaders on both sides to show determination to give a new political impetus to the negotiations. In any case, I stressed that Armenia and Azerbaijan must respect their commitment taken upon accession to the Council of Europe to use only peaceful means for settling the conflict.

79. Official visit to France (17 July 2007)

My visit to Paris included a meeting with the President of the French National Assembly, Bernard Accoyer, a meeting with the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Human Rights, Rama Yade, and a working lunch hosted by the Minister of State for European Affairs, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, and by Mrs Yade, with the participation of members of the French delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly.

The discussions focussed on the role of France, as a host country of the Council of Europe, in further strengthening the unique role that our organisation plays with regard to democracy, human rights and the rule of law across the continent. I brought my interlocutors’ attention to the first annual report of the Assembly on the state of democracy and human rights in Europe, as well as on its monitoring mechanisms. I also highlighted the organisation’s added value in specific areas such as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the development of a partnership with Russia.

I stressed the need for complementarity and coordination of the action of the European Union and the Council of Europe. I pointed out that this was the only way to increase political efficiency and avoid waste of public money. Most importantly, this is the only way to build a Europe without new dividing lines.

These ideas met with the full approval of my interlocutors, who expressed the wish to visit the Council of Europe in the near future and discuss proposals for specific activities. Mrs Yade, in particular, expressed her interest in the organisation of a major parliamentary event involving young people.

Referring to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, and also with regard to the idea promoted by the French authorities of a Mediterranean Union, I expressed the hope that France would continue to support the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

Finally, I sought my interlocutors’ support for the invitation that I had addressed to the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Bernard Kouchner to address the Assembly at its October 2007 part-
session on the occasion of the debate on Darfur.

80. Working visit to Russia (24 July-3 August 2007)

Between 24 July and 3 August 2007, I conducted a working visit to Russia.

In Moscow I made a speech to students of the School of Political Studies, which is supported by the Council of Europe. The speech was followed by a discussion (lasting more than two hours) with 140 students from all over Russia and parts of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

During the meeting with Mr Boris Gryzlov, Speaker of the State Duma, we discussed the preparations for the 2008 presidential elections, the non-ratification of Protocol No. 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights and Russia’s relations with neighbouring countries, the European Union and non-governmental organisations.

In the Tsouach Republic (Tsjeboksary) I met President Boris Fedorov, former Minister of Justice and former PACE member. I also spoke and held discussions in the regional Duma and municipal councils. In addition, I had a meeting with Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow, followed by a working dinner with President Federov and representatives of the business community.

In the Krasnoyarsk region I had meetings with representatives of the regional Duma and the first Deputy Governor Kosubov, along with representatives of the municipal communities. Together with Vera Oskina, a member of the Russian PACE delegation, I visited a hydro-electric power station.

In the Yaroslavl region I met Governor Anatoly Lisitsin.

In the Vladimir region, I met Governor Vinogradof and regional politicians.

Returning to Moscow, I gave a press conference, accompanied by the Head of the Russian delegation, Mr Kosachev, and several television and radio interviews. I took the opportunity to call for the forthcoming elections to be free and fair; in particular, I underlined the importance of all political parties participating in the December Duma election campaign having effective access to the media, this being an issue that would be closely followed by the large PACE election observation mission.

In another interview, I addressed the issue of the proposed missile defence shield and its consequences for European co-operation, harmony and stability, arguing that as an issue with multilateral consequences, decisions should be taken in multilateral fora, including under the guidance of NATO.

81. Visit to the Middle East: Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories (18-24 August 2007)

Amongst the principal highlights and main outcomes of my visit to the region were the following:

- All interlocutors emphasised broad support for the active engagement and commitment of the Council of Europe and the European Union in the Middle-East and especially (the follow-up to) the peace process.

- The importance of the role of the Council of Europe, due to its open relations with all parties involved, ranging from political leaders and especially parliamentarians to religious leaders and civil society. The Council of Europe’s engagement creates more support for the different interlocutors providing the interlocutors with a stronger and broader basis with their grassroots.

- The Council of Europe serves as an example and is seen as an effective instrument to contribute to the peace process and in the future the consolidation of peace. For example, the Council for the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land has asked for formalised relations with the Assembly; the Chief Rabbis in Israel have asked for support for their proposal to ensure formal international protection for all holy monuments and sites; the Council of Europe was asked for involvement in eliminating incitement to hatred from educational materials and the media in both the Palestinian Territories and Israel.

- The added value of the Council of Europe was prominent due to the fact that the Council speaks with one single voice on behalf of 47 countries instead of interference by many different countries on their own merits. In that connection, the instrument of parliamentary diplomacy must not be underestimated. The time and content of the meetings held underline the importance attached to parliamentary diplomacy, the Council of Europe and its “single voice” by all interlocutors.

- The Council of Europe and the EU can contri-
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bute to strengthening the moderate forces in the different countries for a successful peace process. Although the Palestinian Authority and Israel realise that the success of the process depends on their own efforts, they appeal to the international community for support and pressure. The support should not just be given by the United States nor should that from Europe be limited to financial support, although promoting and supporting economic development is of crucial importance.

- The question of detainees was one of great importance to the Palestinian interlocutors, perhaps most acutely that of the detained PLC members, who were being held without charge, with extremely restricted access to their families and, in several cases, with deleterious consequences for their health. This was unacceptable and deeply resented, especially given that the elections had been considered free and fair by the international community.

- It was seen as hugely important for the Fatah administration in the West Bank to be a success, above all in terms of good governance, economic development and security. The international community should continue to provide support, including through economic aid directed at job creation, since its success would set an example to the Palestinian people and, hopefully, diminish support for Hamas and its administration in Gaza. In this respect, it was vital for the Israelis to allow much greater freedom of movement within the West Bank and from it to the outside world, so as to facilitate economic activity and related trade; the security situation in the West Bank should, and would most effectively, be addressed by co-operation between the security forces of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

- The role of non-governmental organisations in both the Palestinian Territories and Israel is important. The NGOs communicate in an open and transparent way, which gives a good overview of the situation “on the ground” instead of only at the political level. Due to the strong relation between the Council of Europe and NGOs, the added value of the Council of Europe was stressed.

- In the past, several leaders from the Middle East have addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This existing commitment between the region and the Council of Europe has been renewed, with invitations made to and, in principle, accepted by King Abdullah II, Speaker Itzig and President Abbas.

As regards each separate leg of the visit:

Jordan:

In Jordan I met with Prime Minister Dr Makouf Bikhet and the Speakers of both the Senate (Mr Zaid Al Rifai) and the House of Representatives (Mr Abdulhadi Majali) and had a private audience with His Majesty King Abdullah II. My interlocutors expressed a hopeful and optimistic view on a peaceful future in the region. They pointed to the latest Arab initiative and the upcoming conference/meeting under US guidance in November 2007 as important initiatives that might provide the chance for a long-lasting peace. We all agreed that the main challenge lies with finding a solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For that, the political will of all parties involved is needed. The current momentum is working in favour of the peace process.

The Jordanian leaders welcomed the involvement and commitment of the Council of Europe in the region and expressed their hope that the Council as well as the EU would play a stronger and more independent role in the near future. They agreed that the use of parliamentary diplomacy within this context should not be underestimated. They fully supported PACE's position as regards the basic conditions for peace, condemnation of the settlement policy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In my talks I also stressed the importance of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. In this respect, the “Amman Message” (a statement of moderate Islamic principles drawn up at King Abdullah’s initiative) was particularly interesting, having been drawn up to improve mutual understanding and respect. We also discussed the problem of (religious) extremism in the region and agreed that economic development and financial support for the fight against poverty are the most important instruments to eliminate extremism.

As regards the region of the Middle East, the leaders of Jordan expressed their concern over Iran, not only in relation to nuclear proliferation but also the suspected help of Iran to extremist non-state actors in the region. We also discussed the situation in Iraq which has become a violent outlet for many of the tensions of the region. We agreed that the international community and especially Europe should contribute to creating stability in the region.

I have invited His Majesty King Abdullah II to
address the Parliamentary Assembly. He accepted my invitation.

Israel:

During my visit to Israel I met the President of the State of Israel Mr Shimon Peres, Vice Prime Minister Mr Hain Ramon, the Speaker of the Knesset Mrs Dalia Itzik and several members of the Knesset.

During the meetings I conducted with them I also experienced a sense of optimism over the current momentum of the peace process. The political and economic horizons are almost free of obstacles. The Israelis are hoping to reach agreement on a “declaration of principles” with the Palestinian Authority by the end of 2007. Israel welcomes the current leaders of the Palestinian Authority as being the single partner to negotiate with. Over recent decades many situations have occurred that in the end have turned out to be just “photo opportunities”. I urged Israeli leaders to recognise the high expectations that exist at the moment and pleaded with them to fulfill their peace obligations for the benefit of all citizens as well as for stability in the region. A coalition for peace is needed instead of the ongoing division for war.

The political leaders of Israel stated that they very much welcomed a contribution from the Council of Europe to the peace process. The Assembly is well respected, especially since the Assembly represents the view of all of Europe. Once again it was made clear the importance that is attached to the ability of the Council to speak with one voice in difficult matters such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

During my meeting with the Speaker of the Knesset and members of the Israeli Parliament, I spoke about the 50th anniversary of the Knesset’s observer status with the PACE. We agreed that this historic moment will be the start of a renewed and strengthened partnership. On that occasion I invited Mrs Itzik to address the Assembly during this anniversary year, an invitation she accepted. I also proposed to set up a tripartite forum involving members of the Knesset, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and members of PACE. My idea was regarded as very interesting and they expressed their will to further discuss it with the (possible) actors involved.

In Israel I also met with religious leaders. First with the Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land and later with both Chief Rabbis. In the evening I had a bilateral meeting with Sheikh Tayseer Tamimi, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Sharia Court in Palestine, also a member of the afore-mentioned Council, who had been denied entry into Jerusalem until I intervened personally with the Deputy Prime Minister.

I encouraged the religious leaders to continue with and strengthen their inter-religious dialogues as part of the peace process but also as an important instrument to improve mutual understanding and respect amongst their constituencies. The religious leaders expressed their appreciation of the Council of Europe as a value community and their enthusiasm for closer co-operation. They also expressed a strong desire to establish formal relations with the Assembly. The Chief Rabbis asked for my support in ensuring respect for and protection of religious sites in the Holy Land.

I also met family members of abducted Israeli soldiers, on whose behalf I had already made various interventions, and expressed my willingness to bring their situation once more to the attention of PACE members. I of course expressed my hope for a positive outcome.

During my visit to Israel I met with Quartet diplomats in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. They shared the common opinion on the existing momentum, but also expressed their concerns regarding the different approaches of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to the peace process, namely the cautious, sceptical approach of Israel versus the “ready to engage” approach of the Palestinians. In general the role of the Quartet and especially the role of Blair is subsidiary to the input of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. However, the common efforts were welcomed. The role of Blair as special envoy for the Middle East was expected to focus mainly on institutional matters.

During my meeting with representatives of various NGOs we mainly discussed the need for free movement of goods in and out of the Palestinian Territories (West Bank) and the removal of road blocks by the Israelis so that the West Bank can develop and prosper economically. They stressed that financial aid to the Palestinian Authority alone is not effective; economic development aid, leading to the creation of productive employment, was more important. As regards the isolation of Gaza, the representatives expressed their concerns over the circumstances under which the citizens in Gaza are living.

As regards Gaza, all interlocutors clearly stated
Visits and meetings

that there was no contact with representatives of Hamas or with people in charge at Gaza. Only humanitarian goods – the content of this term which was somewhat stretched – like food, basic medicine, but also gas and electricity, are provided for. By isolating Gaza and making a success of the West Bank, it is hoped that Hamas’ influence and authority will diminish and that Gaza can be included at a later stage in the future peace agreement.

During my visit to Israel the role of Iran was again discussed. Also in Israel there is a sincere fear that a nuclear Iran will make the world less governable. Israel urges the international community to choose an active approach towards this matter, indicating that if dialogue is no longer successful, other means need to be considered. They suggested that if other countries were not prepared to take strong action, Israel was prepared to go it alone (“do their dirty work”).

I visited the village of Sderot, subject to daily Palestinian rocket attacks, and visited “Yad Vashem”, the Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Memorial of the Holocaust, where I laid a wreath in the Remembrance Hall.

Palestinian Territories (West Bank)

During my visit to the Palestinian Territories I spoke with many representatives of the Palestinian Authority. I met with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, Dr Salam Fayyad, Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Finance, Riyad Al-Malki, Minister of Information, Ashraf Al-Ajramy, Minister of Prisoners and Ex-Prisoners, Dr Saeb Erekat, Head of Negotiations Affairs Department of the PLO, and Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Chairperson of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and several other elected representatives in the Council.

During these meetings my interlocutors stated their willingness to seize the current momentum in the peace process. Bringing about peace is the main task of the current Palestinian leadership, however they recognise that some means are lacking. I expressed my support for their strong commitment, but also stressed the need for solid co-operation and good dialogue with Israel in order to truly realise peace and very importantly to overcome the security problems. I stressed to the Palestinian leaders that it is of the utmost importance not only to define the challenges that lay ahead, but especially to show their citizens that those challenges are being dealt with on a day-to-day basis.

The Palestinian leaders stated that they prefer an agreement or clear framework to be the outcome of the current peace negotiations instead of another declaration of principles. Whilst such agreement could only come through bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, its implementation would require third party support; with which European involvement would be welcome. In this context the Council of Europe can also be of added value, as all interlocutors underlined. I therefore invited President Abbas to address the Assembly at a forthcoming session, an invitation he accepted.

In several meetings the matter of detainees, in particular detained PLC members, was addressed. I shared the concerns of the family of detained PLC members about the conditions in prison, including the detainees’ health, as well as extreme restrictions on family visits. In my meeting with representatives of the PLC I talked about my proposal to create a tripartite forum with members of the Knesset, the PLC and PACE. The members expressed their wish to intensify the co-operation with PACE.

I also met with several representatives of different NGOs in the Palestinian Territories. They expressed their worries about the living conditions of people in the Gaza and the need for economic development in combination with free movement of goods.

I laid a wreath at Yasser Arafat’s tomb.

82. Joint European Parliament Conference of Presidents / PACE Presidential Committee meeting (Brussels, 30 August 2007)

At the end of the joint meeting between the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament and the ad hoc Committee of the Chairpersons of Political Groups (Presidential Committee) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) which took place on 30 August 2007 in Brussels, the President of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, and I, together with the Presidents of our respective political groups, made the following statement:

“The European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe share the same values and principles; they both strive for a continent based on peace, democracy, human rights, rule of law, social justice and prosperity.

M y P r e s i d e n c y 2 0 0 5 - 2 0 0 7 : r e a l i t i e s a n d d r e a m s

1 4 7
The co-operation between the two institutions is vital in their common endeavour to build a Europe without dividing lines. Complementarity and joint action whenever possible are a matter of political responsibility and accountability to Europe’s citizens, as this is the best way to enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of activities and waste of public money.

Co-operation between the European Parliament and PACE has constantly improved and has produced commendable results, as has been witnessed most recently in their co-operation on the question of a world-wide abolition of the death penalty and in their discussions on their respective reports on CIA secret detention centres.

Much more can be achieved in a number of other areas where the two institutions can combine their respective strengths: in particular, in the promotion of democracy, including co-operation in joint electoral observation work, and in the furtherance of respect for human rights, in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue; in the setting of basic legal standards within Europe; the process of further EU enlargement and the European neighbourhood policy as well as in the European Union’s partnership with Russia; the fight against corruption, trafficking in human beings and domestic violence.

In the meeting of 30 August 2007, it was furthermore agreed to request that the two Secretaries-General make proposals for an agreement on strengthening co-operation between PACE and the European Parliament. The signature of such an agreement will add a parliamentary dimension to the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed between the Council of Europe and the European Union on 23 May 2007.

83. Official visit to the Netherlands (5 September 2007)

On Monday 3 September I paid an official working visit to my home country, the Netherlands. It was my first visit to the Netherlands during my presidency.

As regards the Dutch government, I met with the Prime Minister Mr Balkenende, the Minister for European Affairs Mr Timmermans and the Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Verhagen. In our bilateral meetings we discussed the following issues:

- The added value of the Council of Europe in relation to the European Union, more specifically the need for more attention for the activities and instruments of the Council of Europe, the proposals of Mr Juncker in his report on the relation between the Council of Europe and the EU, and the PACE report on the state of human rights and democracy;
- The potential of the Council of Europe to strengthen and improve the role of and relations with NGOs, civil society and religious institutions as representatives of the European value community;
- The risk of the EU member states acting as a bloc within the Committee of Ministers;
- The need for a long-term, stable partnership with Russia for a successful future of the European continent;
- The signing and ratification of Council of Europe conventions and the extent to which an early ratification underlines the importance the Netherlands attaches to the principles and goals of these conventions.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs decorated me, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen of the Netherlands, commander in the Order of Orange Nassau.

During my visit I also met with leaders of the political groups in the Dutch Parliament and the members of the Dutch delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. We mainly spoke about the need for more national follow-up of Council of Europe activities, the need to put the core activities of the Council of Europe on the national political agenda and the important role of parliamentary diplomacy.

Furthermore I held bilateral talks with the President of the Dutch Senate, Mrs Timmerman-Buck, and the President of the House of Representatives, Mrs Verbeet. Again I raised the issue of the necessity to increase the national follow-up of the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe by stressing that Council of Europe activities are an integral part of the responsibilities and work of a member of parliament. We furthermore discussed the participation of the Dutch parliament in Council of Europe campaigns.

At the end of the afternoon I attended a round
Visits and meetings

84. 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly
(Sibiu, Romania, 4-7 September 2007)

From 4-6 September 2007 I visited Sibiu, Romania, to participate in the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly.

In my speech to the plenary session of the Assembly, I emphasised the importance of values to ensuring respect for human dignity in modern societies; for this reason, it was important for politicians to co-operate more closely with religious organisations, whilst maintaining the separation between politics and religion. I also promoted the advantages of the Parliamentary Assembly as a natural forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the importance of its soft power potential. Finally, I informed the Assembly of my recent visit to the Middle East and, in particular, of my support for the proposal made to me there by religious leaders to establish an international instrument for the protection of religious heritage.

On the fringes of the Assembly, I held bilateral meetings with Metropolitan Kirill, head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Relations, Romania’s European Commissioner Leonard Orban, and leading officials of the organising bodies, the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops’ Conferences, as well as the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union. I also participated in a press conference held by the Assembly organisers and gave numerous interviews to various journalists.

I also took the occasion to meet members of the Romanian delegation – Mr Frunda, Mr Berceanu, Mr Ungureanu and Mr Mereuta – along with Mrs Nicolae, chairperson of the Romanian Senate investigation committee.

The delegation expressed its great disappointment with the outcome of the Marty report, which they felt was inconsistent with the Council of Europe’s principles of fairness and due process. Whilst they were prepared to continue their activities as a delegation to the Assembly, they did not consider the question to be closed. They intended to propose to the Bureau that a new report be initiated and, in particular, wanted to see copies of the anonymous witness depositions.

85. Meetings in Rome on the occasion of the Bureau meeting (10 September 2007)

On 10 September 2007 in the afternoon, I held a series of meetings with the Italian authorities. I met Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, Fausto Bertinotti, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Franco Marini, President of the Senate and, together with members of the Bureau, Cardinal Bertone, Secretary of State of the Vatican.

My Rome discussions focused, in particular, on the role and added value of the Council of Europe, the need to avoid new dividing lines in Europe and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. The President of Italy accepted my invitation to address the Assembly at one of its future part-sessions.

I also gave an interview to Sky News, an information TV channel, about the outcome of the Bureau meeting and the forthcoming October part-session.

86. Official visit to the Baltic states: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (19-24 September 2007)

The objective of my visit to the Baltic states was, in particular, to discuss the following topics:

- the role of the Council of Europe as the pan-European Organisation based on the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law;
- the need to avoid new dividing lines in Europe;
- the importance of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

During these visits, I emphasised that it was
imperative to respect the painful past of the Baltic states. I stressed on many occasions that the Assembly was one of the few international institutions to condemn officially the crimes of the totalitarian communist regimes and I was proud to declare, especially in this area where the people suffered so much, that I was at the origin of this Assembly report.

In this connection, I reiterated that any attempt to glorify criminal regimes should never be tolerated in any Council of Europe member state.

At the same time, I stressed that the aim of European integration has always been to allow European nations to build their present and their future together. For that purpose, I said that we had to pay history its due tribute and not forget, but also to give it the place it belongs – in the past. The past should not be used as a tool for political purposes to become a source of new controversies and divisions.

I congratulated very sincerely the Baltic states and their people on achieving full and successful integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures which is, to my mind, the best guarantee that the tragic past will never be repeated.

I also underlined the need for equal treatment for all those living in the Baltic states, and the importance of building a strategic partnership between Russia and the rest of Europe.

In particular, I expressed my opinion that relations between the EU and Russia should not be dependent on incidents or conflicts involving individual states, but on a consistent policy of partnership which takes into account the long-term interests of both parties. The Baltic states, I said, could play a vital role as catalyst and bridge in this partnership.

Throughout the visit, I insisted on the importance of the Council of Europe conventions, in particular the Framework Convention for the Protection of national minorities (signed and ratified by the Baltic states), the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (neither signed nor ratified by any of the Baltic states), Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning non-discrimination (signed, but not ratified, by Estonia and Latvia and neither signed nor ratified by Lithuania) and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (signed but not ratified by Latvia and neither signed nor ratified by Estonia and Lithuania).

I used the opportunity of these visits to address more general problems also existing in other Council of Europe member states. In this connection:

- I emphasised the need to be more active in countering all forms of intolerance and xenophobia, and to ensure strict implementation and enforcement of laws in this field, calling for the introduction of proper human rights education in schools;
- I recalled the ongoing Council of Europe campaign on domestic violence against women and urged all European countries to take action against this scourge, which is very present in our societies, but often ignored;
- I stressed the importance of the Council of Europe Convention on Trafficking in Human Beings, reiterating that this trade in people is a grave violation of fundamental human rights and dignity which must not exist in the 21st century. I underlined, at the same time, the responsibility of the receiving countries, particularly in Western Europe, because there would be no trade without demand.

1/ Estonia (18-20 September 2007)

Whilst in Estonia, I stressed that the most important challenge was to fully integrate the Russian-speaking population, which should have the full range of rights and opportunities enjoyed by all European citizens.

This integration should not be limited to citizenship, but be accompanied by active measures at citizen level to encourage voluntary integration, avoid any discrimination in the labour market and promote language-learning. I expressed my opinion that a significant part of the population of a European Union country could not remain stateless and encouraged the authorities to continue their efforts to improve the situation of stateless persons.

Referring to Estonia’s relations with Russia, I said it was in the interest of both countries to invest heavily in their relationship and that a broader and deeper partnership with Russia is necessary for peace, stability and progress in the whole of Europe. In this connection, I urged the authorities to use dialogue to defuse any possible tensions.

During the visit, I met Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Foreign Minister Urmans Paet, and Riigikogu Speaker Ene Ergma, among others. Furthermore, I held question-and-answer sessions with NGOs representing minorities and students.

2/ Latvia (20-22 September 2007)
In Latvia, I expressed my satisfaction at the generally positive climate of relations among the different ethno-cultural communities living in Latvia. However, I declared that it was unacceptable that more than a sixth of the population of a Council of Europe member state remains without citizenship, and urged the authorities to take more active steps to solve this situation. An immediate first step would be to ensure that newly-born children receive citizenship automatically, unless their parents opt out, to avoid the number of non-citizens increasing.

I also urged the authorities to grant the right to vote in local elections to all permanent residents on the basis of the principle of non-discrimination.

Regarding relations with Russia, I welcomed the recent ratification by the Russian State Duma of the frontier treaty between Latvia and Russia, and expressed my hope that the Treaty, which has already been ratified by Latvia, would be formally concluded soon. In my opinion, the Treaty is an important step towards the normalisation of relations between the two countries, which is also in the best interest of the European Union as a whole.

During this visit, I met the President met Latvian Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis, Saeima Speaker Indulis Emsis, Foreign Minister Artis Pabriks, Integration Minister Oskar Karstens, members of Latvia’s delegation to the Assembly and members of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as representatives of minorities and human rights NGOs.

3/ Lithuania (22-24 September 2007)

In Lithuania I declared that, in granting citizenship to those already on its territory at independence, Lithuania gave an example to its neighbours and created a solid foundation for good relations with its minorities. I called on the Lithuanian authorities to continue their efforts to ensure equal rights for all and maintain the positive trends, especially as regards education, proposals for the introduction of double citizenship and the enjoyment of property rights.

Furthermore, I discussed relations with Belarus. I recalled my efforts to re-open dialogue with the Belarusian authorities, but reiterated that the process could not begin without concrete positive steps on the Belarus side, in particular the release of those considered as political prisoners.

In the absence of official dialogue, it is my opinion that relations at citizen level should be encouraged. I therefore urged the EU to facilitate the acquisition of visas by Belarus citizens, and fix a reasonable visa fee, adapted to the financial possibilities of ordinary citizens.

During the visit, I met the Lithuanian Prime Minister Gediminas Kirkilas, Seimas Speaker Viktoras Muntianas and leading parliamentarians as well as representatives of minorities, civil society and religious leaders.


On 16 October, I addressed a conference in The Hague entitled “Security of relations: The Netherlands and Russia”, organised by the “Energy Delta Institute” as a high-level meeting for politicians and top executives in the energy industry. After my address, I took part in a round-table dialogue.

In my speech, I underlined that a stable and strong partnership with Russia is essential to peace, prosperity and stability in Europe. Europe must invest in relations with Russia on every possible level.

I used this occasion to spell out a three-point strategy for achieving such a partnership. Firstly, the keystone should be the common values upheld by the Council of Europe, because these values are not just important in themselves, but human rights, democracy and the rule of law are the prerequisites for prosperity, peace, stability and economic growth.

Secondly, creating an atmosphere of trust and co-operation, not that of confrontation, is necessary to help prevent the return of cold war thinking. I said that the lack of consultation over a planned US missile shield in Europe was an example in this respect.

I underlined that we must not close our eyes to the shortcomings in the fields of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Russia. However, we must think positive and be tough, but fair, in our dealings with Russia. In this connection, I reminded that the Assembly’s monitoring reports on Russia were an excellent example of such cooperation, based on involvement, not confrontation.

Thirdly, I stressed that we need to intensify people-to-people contacts and invest in personal
relations. We also need a more open EU visa policy - including freer movement for students and professionals.

88. Working visit to Slovenia (17 October 2007)

During my working visit to Slovenia, which took place in the context of the forthcoming Slovenian EU Presidency, I concentrated on the following main issues: the EU Presidency, the EU’s accession to the ECHR and regional issues including Kosovo.

Other topics covered were the Council of Europe’s role in ensuring a Europe without dividing lines and the follow-up given by national parliaments to PACE activities, in particular the annual report on human rights and democracy, and the Assembly’s current campaign on domestic violence against women.

I met the State Secretary at Slovenia’s Foreign Affairs Ministry Andrej Šter, Slovenian National Assembly Speaker France Cukjati, members of Slovenia’s delegation to PACE and the leaders of different political groups in the Parliament, as well as representatives of the Slovenian minority in Austria.

89. EPP Statutory Summit (Lisbon, 18 October 2007)

In my capacity as President of the Parliamentary Assembly, I took part in the EPP Summit preceding the European Union Summit. It was an excellent opportunity to explain, in the presence of many Heads of State and Government, the Assembly’s position on several issues concerning cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union, including the European Union accession to the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR). I also held a series of bilateral meetings on this occasion.

90. Speeches at the Venice Commission plenary meeting (Venice, Italy, 20 October 2007)

I attended the plenary meeting of the Venice Commission on 20 October 2007 in order to express, in person, my recognition of its important contribution to the Council of Europe and to democratic development, both in Europe and beyond. I also wanted to convey my sincere gratitude for the excellent, long-standing and close cooperation of the Venice Commission with the Assembly.

In my address, I pointed out that the Venice Commission is one of the essential elements that make the Council of Europe indispensable to the whole of Europe when it comes to promoting and protecting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. I deeply regretted that governments and most members of parliament, including the European Parliament, were not sufficiently aware of its work. I expressed my commitment to supporting and promoting the Venice Commission in my official meetings and visits, at all levels, as I had done throughout my mandate as a President.

I was particularly honoured on this occasion to receive the Venice Commission Award – a concrete symbol of our mutual appreciation for the work we do together.

For over 5 years the Venice Commission has been an enlarged agreement, open to non-member States of the Council of Europe. I therefore also participated in an exchange of views with the Union of Arab Constitutional Courts and Councils. I expressed my appreciation to the fact that distinguished lawyers and judges from both European and Arab countries can come together to discuss matters of common and profound public interest. I stressed the significance of the rule of law to the Council of Europe system and the importance of the Venice Commission. I received a commemorative plate from the Union of Arab Constitutional Courts and Councils.

91. Medal award ceremony for Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg, and speech at the University Robert Schuman (Strasbourg, 25 October 2007)

On 25 October 2007, I attended the ceremony of the award of the title of “Dr Honoris Causa” to Jean-Claude Juncker by the University Robert Schuman in Strasbourg. This ceremony was followed by a Colloquy on the theme of “The future of the Council of Europe vis-à-vis other international organisations”, where I delivered the introductory speech.


From 18 - 20. November 2007 I visited Aachen, Germany, to participate in the European Day on
Visits and meetings

Migration and Integration conference, co-organised by the State of North Rhine-Westphalia and the PACE in co-operation with the European Parliament and the Charlemagne Prize Foundation. Besides the Assembly, the European Parliament and other international Parliamentary Assemblies, the conference brought together politicians from local, regional, national and European levels, members of migrant communities, as well as religious leaders and academics.

In my opening address, I emphasised that migrants are an integral and important part of European society. I highlighted that migration – if properly managed – brings enormous opportunities and advantages for our societies as well as for the countries of origin. Integration, however, is the greatest challenge in achieving the positives outcomes of migration. I stressed that integration cannot be a one-sided adaptation process: it requires dialogue and good will on the part both of the host society and of migrants. Education plays an important part in this process. I pointed out that inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue is the key to integration and one of the most important contemporary challenges.

I encouraged all participants to find ways of improving inter-cultural dialogue and mutual understanding. In this context, I announced the inauguration in 2008 of a European Day for Integration and Intercultural Tolerance as a part of PACE’s contribution to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

I also took the occasion to announce that PACE together with CIS IPA have reached an agreement to continue the tradition of joint conferences and the next one, to be held on 3 April 2008, would be devoted to migration issues.

During a ceremony in Maastricht, I underlined Jean-Claude Juncker’s outstanding contribution to European integration and cooperation and his visionary report on “Council of Europe – European Union: a sole ambition for the European continent”. I awarded him with a medal and a diploma, the highest distinction of the President of the Assembly, intended to pay tribute to “a great European and a genuine friend of the Council of Europe, deeply committed to its values and principles”.

95. Ceremony of signing of the PACE/EP agreement (Brussels, 28 November 2007)

On 28 November 2007 in Brussels, European Parliament (EP) President Hans-Gert Pöttering and I signed an agreement to improve cooperation between the two Institutions and increase complementary initiatives and synergies. This agreement is a concrete follow-up to Jean-Claude Juncker’s report. Among specific items in the Agreement are regular meetings at presidential level and enhanced cooperation between respective committees as well as in election observation missions.

96. Meetings with the Slovak Authorities at the occasion of the Bureau and Standing Committee (Bratislava (22-23 November 2007)

During this visit I had official meetings with Ivan Gasparovic, President of Slovakia, with Pavel Paska, President of the National Council and Ján Kubis, Minister of Foreign Affairs.

97. Official visit to Mexico (30 November – 5 December 2007)

98. Working visit to Moscow (19-22 December 2007)

99. Official visit to Turkey (12-17 January 2008)

These visits had not yet taken place at the time that this brochure went to print.
Appendix 2
Visits of heads of state and other personalities to PACE debates

At my invitation as President of the Parliamentary Assembly, and upon my initiative, that of the other members of the Presidential Committee and proposals coming from the Bureau and other PACE committees, 83 personalities visited and contributed to the debates of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Their contributions have provided the much-needed link between politics initiated and carried out by an international pan-European organisation like the Council of Europe and its Assembly, and politics at national level, thus stirring into motion a process that goes from member states towards Strasbourg and vice versa, a process which is contributing to bring Europe and its policies closer to European citizens and their needs.

The following is a detailed listing of visiting personalities:

**Visitors 2005**

1. Mr Alcee L. Hastings, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
2. Mr Happert and Mr Michiels, Benelux President and Secretary-General
3. Mr Victor Yushchenko, President of Ukraine
4. Mr Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia
5. Mr Stefa Goris, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU)
6. Mr Jan Truszczynski, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers
7. Mr Michel Barnier, French Minister of Foreign Affairs
8. Mr Mikhail Krotov, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)
9. Mr Svetozar Marovic, President of Serbia and Montenegro
10. Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg
11. Mr Adam Daniel Rotfeld, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers
12. Mr Saleh, Mr Tijjendor, Mr Turek, Pan-African Assembly (PAA)
13. Mr Jean Lemierre, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)
14. Mr Chaudhry Amir Hussain and Mr José de Venecia, Association of Asian Parliamentarians for Peace (AAPP)
15. Mr Diogo Freitas do Amaral, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers
16. Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
17. Mr Marian Lupu, President of the Moldovan Parliament
18. Mr Joseph Daul, Chairman of the European Parliament Conference of Committee Chairmen
19. Mr Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Spain
20. Mr Ekeledin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Islamic Conference
21. Ms Asma Jahangir, United Nations Special Rapporteur on “Freedom of religion or belief”
22. Mr Donald Johnston, Secretary-General, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
23. Mr Volodymyr Lytvyn, Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament
24. Mr Fernando d’Oliveira Neves, State Secretary for European Affairs of Portugal, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers

**Visitors 2006**

25. Mr Elmar Maharramoglu Mammadyarov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan
26. Mr Jan Eliasson, President of the sixtyieth session of the United Nations General Assembly
27. Mr Serguei Stanishev, Prime Minister of Bulgaria
28. Mr Serguei Holovaty, Minister of Justice of Ukraine
29. Mr Traian Basescu, President of Romania
30. Mr Enrique Jackson Ramirez, President of the Senate of Mexico
31. Mr Mihai-Razvan Ungureanu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania
32. Mr Klaus Wanger, President of the Parliament of Liechtenstein
Visitors 2007

57. His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I
58. Mrs Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
59. H.R.H. Princess Caroline of Hanover, President of the World Association of Children's Friends (AMADE)
60. Mr Guy Verhofstadt, Prime Minister of Belgium
61. Mr Martti Ahtisaari, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the future status process for Kosovo (UNOSEK)
62. Mr Kostas Karamanlis, Prime Minister of Greece
63. Mr Ranko Krivokapic, Speaker of the Parliament of Montenegro
64. Mr Viktor Yanukovych, Prime Minister of Ukraine
65. Ms Louise Arbour, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
66. Ms Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International (AI)
67. Mr Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch (HRW)
68. Ms Eva Smith Asmussen, President of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)
69. Mr Alan Phillips, President of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
70. Mr Alfred Gusenbauer, Federal Chancellor of Austria
71. Mr Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
72. Mr Hans-Gert Pöttering, President of the European Parliament
73. Mr Jean Lemierre, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
74. Rabbi Arthur Schneier, Founder and President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation
75. Mr António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
76. Mrs Carla del Ponte, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
77. Mr Filip Vujanovic, President of Montenegro
78. Mr Brunoz McKinley, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM)
79. Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and all Russia
80. Mr Vojislav Kostunica, Prime Minister of Serbia
81. Mr Abdullah Gül, President of Turkey
82. Mr Angel Gurria, Secretary-General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
83. Mr Agung Laksono, President of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA)
The following is a list of the speeches delivered by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly. They can be consulted at: http://assembly.coe.int. The speeches which are highlighted are appended.

**Speeches 2005**

1. **Speech on the occasion of his election as President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (first part of the Assembly’s 2005 Ordinary Session)**

2. Speech on the occasion of the Commemoration ceremony of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz (Strasbourg, 25 January 2005)

3. Speech during a visit to the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies (Luxembourg, 23 March 2005)


5. Speech before the Senior Advisory Council of the Association of Asian Parliaments for Peace (AAPP) (Manila, 5 April 2005)

6. Statement at the conference dedicated to the 60th Anniversary of the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition in the Second World War (St Petersburg, 15 April 2005)

7. Speech at the opening of the second part of the Assembly’s 2005 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 25 April 2005)

8. **Speech on the occasion of the Third Council of Europe Summit, Third Plenary Session: “European Architecture” (Warsaw, 17 May 2005)**

9. Statement before the Plenary Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 2 June 2005)

10. Speech at the opening of the third part of the Assembly’s 2005 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 20 June 2005)

11. Statement to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Kiev, 7 July 2005)

12. Opening statement at the Bureau of the Assembly (Monaco, 1 September 2005)


14. Speech at the Graduation Ceremony of the Masters’ Programme of the Maastricht School of Management (Maastricht, 15 September 2005)

15. Speech at the Seminar/Round Table Discussion of the EPP/CD Group (Strasbourg, 2 October 2005)

16. Speech at the opening of the fourth part of the Assembly’s 2005 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 3 October 2005)

17. Speech at the Konrad Adenauer Round Table (Brussels, 20 October 2005)

18. Speech before the Albanian Parliament (Tirana, 24 October 2005)


20. Speech before the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Ankara, 9 November 2005)

21. Speech on the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebrations for the European flag (Strasbourg, 16 November 2005)

22. Speech on the occasion of the 115th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 17 November 2005)

23. Speech before the Romanian Parliament (Bucharest, 24 November 2005)

24. Opening speech at the Europa Nostra Forum (Brussels, 7 December 2005)
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Speeches 2006

25. Speech at the opening of the first part of the Assembly’s 2006 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 23 January 2006)


27. Address at the Conference on Belarus (Prague, 22-23 February 2006)

28. Speech before the European People’s Party Congress (Rome, 31 March 2006)

29. Speech at the opening of the second part session of the Assembly’s 2006 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 10 April 2006)

30. Speech on the occasion of the centenary of the Russian State Duma (St Petersburg, 27 April 2006)

31. Statement at the International Conference on European Parliamentarianism: Past and Present (St Petersburg, 28 April 2006)

32. Speech at the debate on foreign affairs in the Dutch Senate (16 May 2006)

33. Speech on the occasion of the 116th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 19 May 2006)

34. Speech at the opening of the third part of the Assembly’s 2006 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 26 June 2006)

35. Speech at the opening of the fourth part of the Assembly’s 2006 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 2 October 2006)

36. Speech on the occasion of the Forum for the Future of Democracy (Moscow, 18-19 October 2006)

37. Speech delivered before the Belarusian State University (19 January 2007)

38. Speech at the opening of the first part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary session (Strasbourg, 22 January 2007)

39. Speech on the occasion of the European launch of the UN study on violence against children (Strasbourg, 23 January 2007)

40. Speech before the two chambers of the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, 7 July 2006)

41. Speech at the conference on “Completing Europe’s Southern Dimension: the values that bind us” (Dubrovnik, Croatia, 10 July 2006)

42. Speech before the Parliament of Moldova (Chisinau, 27 July 2006)

43. Speech delivered at the Conference « Pour une politique agricole et rurale euro-méditerranéenne dans un cadre mondialisé » (Strasbourg, 28-29 September 2006)

44. Speech before the Parliament of Moldova (Chisinau, 27 July 2006)

45. Speech delivered at the Conference « Play fair with sport » (Strasbourg, 29 September 2006)

46. Speech at the official opening of the Conference « All different, all equal » (Strasbourg, 2 October 2006)

47. Speech at the conference on “Completing Europe’s Southern Dimension: the values that bind us” (Dubrovnik, Croatia, 10 July 2006)

48. Speech delivered at the Conference « Play fair with sport » (Strasbourg, 29 September 2006)

49. Speech at the opening of the fourth part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 2 October 2006)

Speeches 2007

50. Speech before the Parliament of Montenegro (Podgorica, 11 July 2006)

51. Speech before the Parliament of Moldova (Chisinau, 27 July 2006)

52. Speech at the opening of the first part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary session (Strasbourg, 22 January 2007)

53. Speech on the occasion of the 3rd World Congress against the Death Penalty (Paris, 1 February 2007)

54. Speech at the opening of the third part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary session (Strasbourg, 26 June 2006)

55. Opening speech at the Standing Committee (San Marino, 17 November 2006)

56. Speech at the opening of the third part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary session (Strasbourg, 26 June 2006)

57. Speech before the Parliament of Montenegro (Podgorica, 11 July 2006)

58. Speech at the conference on “Completing Europe’s Southern Dimension: the values that bind us” (Dubrovnik, Croatia, 10 July 2006)

59. Speech delivered before the Belarusian State University (19 January 2007)

60. Speech delivered before the Belarusian State University (19 January 2007)

61. Speech delivered at the Conference « Establishing a Community code on visas » (Brussels, 28 February 2007)
57. Speech before the Fondazione Mediterraneo – Maison de la Méditerranée (Naples, 30 March 2007)

58. Speech at the opening of the second part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 16 April 2007)

59. Opening statement on the occasion of the PACE debate on the annual report on human rights and democracy in Europe (Strasbourg, 18 April 2007)

60. Speech on the occasion of the 11th Congress of the European Federation of Public Service Employees on “(Social) Market economy: public services under pressure” (Luxembourg, 18 April 2007)

61. Speech on the occasion of the round table organised as part of the “Building a Europe for and with children” programme (Strasbourg, 19 April 2007)

62. Statement at the 116th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Nusa Duaa, Indonesia, 1 May 2007)

63. Speech on the occasion of the award of the Charlemagne Prize (Aachen, 16 May 2007)

64. Opening speech delivered at the PACE Standing Committee (Belgrade, 24 May 2007)

65. Speech delivered at the 28th plenary session of the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States (St Petersburg, 31 May 2007)

66. Statement on the occasion of the International Conference on Pan-European Co-operation, “Intercultural and inter-religious dialogue” (St Petersburg, 1 June 2007)

67. Speech given at the opening of the “Model European Parliament” (Maastricht, 4 June 2007)

68. Speech delivered at the Forum for the Future of Democracy (Stockholm, 13 June 2007)

69. Speech before the conference of the Junior Chamber International (Maastricht, 15 June 2007)

70. Speech delivered at the international conference on Christianity, Culture and Moral Values entitled “political life-ethical life: the challenge” (Moscow, 19-21 June 2007)

71. Speech at the opening of the third part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 25 June 2007)

72. Welcome speech delivered at the opening of the 29th European Seminar of the Kolpingwerk (Strasbourg, 25 June 2007)

73. Opening statement of the PACE debate on the Marty report (Strasbourg, 27 June 2007)

74. Opening statement on the occasion of the PACE debate on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue (Strasbourg, 29 June 2007)

75. Speech at the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly (Sibiu, 6 September 2007)

76. Speeching points for meetings with students in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (18-24 September 2007)

77. Speech at the opening of the fourth part of the Assembly’s 2007 Ordinary Session (Strasbourg, 1 October 2007)

78. Speech on the security of relations between the Netherlands and Russia: partnership with Russia – keystone for a stable and prosperous future of Europe (The Hague, 16 October 2007)


80. Speech on the occasion of the unveiling of the monument to Edith Stein (Radovlijca, 17 October 2007)

81. Speeches delivered at the Venice Commission plenary meeting (Venice, 20 October 2007)

82. Speech delivered at the Université Robert Schuman at a “Colloquy on the future of Europe” (Strasbourg, 25 October 2007)

83. Speech on Europe (The Hague, 2 November 2007)

84. Speech on the occasion of the European Day on migration and integration : “Migrants: actors and vectors of intercultural dialogue” (Aachen, 19-20 November 2007)

85. Speech of thanks to His Excellency Jean-Michel Gaussot, French Ambassador to the Netherlands, on the occasion of the presentation of the Insigna of Commander of the Légion d’Honneur (The Hague, 20.11.2007)

86. Laudatio for Jean-Claude Juncker, Prime Minister of Luxembourg (Neerbeek, the Netherlands, 24 November 2007)
“Daddy, I’m scared, please help”. These were the last words of two-year-old Ragnar Bang-Ericsson from Norway as he was torn away from his father’s grasp by the force of the tsunami that hit the Thai coast on 26 December.

Over 225,000 victims, very many of them children, perished in this, the greatest natural disaster to hit mankind in our lifetime.

We are shocked by the devastation visited by nature upon human settlements.

We are overwhelmed by the immense grief of those who have lost their loved ones.

We could not help Ragnar and all the others who were swept away, but we can help the millions of victims who survived.

The solidarity of the international community and its willingness to help are unprecedented. This tsunami has brought out the best in us, as human beings.

The world reacted, united, and it did so with determination.

We should now ensure that this determination continues once the spotlights are turned off and the world’s attention focuses elsewhere.

At the same time, let us not forget the millions of people who suffer from exclusion, lack prospects and face extreme poverty.

Similar assistance is needed in many other places, which suffer the consequences of what a recent UN report labelled “the silent Tsunami”. Poverty and disease kill thousands of children every month. We should demonstrate the same solidarity there too and help people to enjoy the most basic human right of all: to exist, and to exist in dignity.

To honour the memory of the victims, through silent prayer or meditation, may I now invite you to rise and observe a minute’s silence.

Thank you.

Dear colleagues,

I am deeply grateful for the confidence you have shown in electing me President of our Parliamentary Assembly. I will do my utmost to honour your confidence and to carry out my duties and responsibilities in the best possible way.

While my thanks go to all of you, I wish to acknowledge in particular the support I received from my political group, the European People’s Party, and the Netherlands’ delegation, both of which I had the honour to lead until now.

My entire political career has been dedicated to European co-operation. The Members and Observers in this Assembly have been a tremendous inspiration to my work.

I would like specifically to thank Peter Schieder, Lord Russell-Johnston and my other predecessors for their leadership and guidance. I should also like to thank the Secretary General of the Assembly, Mr Bruno Haller, and his staff, as well as all other Council of Europe collaborators for their assistance.

I look forward to working closely with all of you in the future. Finally, as a family man, I especially wish to thank my wife and my three children for their continuous loving support.

Dear colleagues, I see three clear priorities ahead of us:

First: strengthening the effectiveness of our Assembly, notably by greater interaction with national parliaments and making our work even more relevant for our citizens;

Second: Developing relations with our partner institutions, the United Nations, the OSCE and in particular the European Union;

Third: Ensuring the success of the Third Summit and the implementation of its decisions.

Allow me to briefly expand on each of these, and in doing so, let me recall what the Council of Europe was set up to do.

In a prophetic radio broadcast in March 1943, during the darkest days of the Second World War, Sir Winston Churchill, who died exactly 40 years ago to the day, foresaw the following:

“There should come into being a Council of Europe … to … prevent renewed aggression and the preparation of future wars ….

Anyone can see that this Council when created must eventually embrace the whole of Europe and that all the main branches of the European family must some day be partners in it.”

This European family, of 800 million individuals, now exists. Only the citizens of Belarus, suffering under an authoritarian regime, are not yet able to join us.

You, as members of the Parliamentary Assembly, directly represent these 800 million citizens. 800 million people with different cultures, different nationalities, a wide range of political views and religious beliefs, but who are united by common values. Values that are embodied in the Council of Europe’s standards and principles. Values that can strengthen social cohesion in our societies and further peace and stability on our continent.
As Chancellor Kohl said in this very same Assembly ten years ago: “dass die Parlementarische Versammlung des Europarats das ‘demokratische Gewissen’ Europas verkörpert ... Sie stehen für eine Werteordnung, ohne die es keine freihheitliche Zukunft in Europa gibt.”

Indeed, the Council of Europe is first and foremost a community of values, which has, in over half a century, established a unique European “acquis”. More than one third of the Council of Europe’s 200 conventions originated in the Assembly. Moreover, our debates very often broke new ground and paved the way, both within the Council of Europe and beyond, for new initiatives and innovative policy. Our Assembly is also a school of democracy, a training ground for future political leaders.

Parliamentary diplomacy is the active involvement of parliamentarians and parliamentary institutions in situations of political crisis and deadlock. This has increasingly proven to be an essential complement to traditional intergovernmental co-operation and an integral part of international relations. The preparation of the European Union’s Constitutional Treaty, for instance, provides excellent examples of parliamentarians achieving a breakthrough, where governments were blocked.

There are many other examples, also involving members of this Assembly. How then, can we strengthen our effectiveness and make our work even more relevant for our citizens? In order to make our work better-known and more effective, we should focus more on our core tasks, and carry them out even better. Democracy, human rights and rule of law were, and remain, the Council of Europe’s raison d’être. This makes us unique. Strengthening social cohesion through culture, education and sport is an integral part of these tasks. Racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism and intolerance are, sadly, ever-increasing concerns in our societies. Fighting these phenomena by promoting respect and understanding should therefore continue to figure prominently among our priorities.

Moreover, we should make better use of our Organisation as the best-placed forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Furthermore, we should regularly check the relevance of our legal instruments and adapt them when needed, as we are currently doing in the fight against terrorism. However, many important Conventions have still only been ratified by a limited number of member states. With our double mandate as members of PACE and as national parliamentarians, we should increase our efforts to promote ratification of our key texts. I intend to raise this issue with national delegations. We should never fail to be self-critical and should prove our added value constantly. We should explain clearly to our citizens what the Council of Europe’s work means to them in their daily life, and we should stand ready to take their concerns into account.

To this end, we should develop closer relations with civil society and in particular with the international NGOs that participate in the work of the Council of Europe. An effective Assembly should communicate effectively, also with its internal partners.

I shall seek to improve co-operation with our counterparts, the Committee of Ministers, and with our fellow politicians in the Congress. I also wish to work constructively with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and foster contacts with the President of the European Court of Human Rights and with the Commissioner for Human Rights.

In addition, I intend to meet regularly with the Chairpersons of other key Council of Europe bodies, such as the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the Venice Commission, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), and the North-South Centre. Annual debates on their activities should be followed by debates in our national parliaments.

As regards my second priority, our relations with our external partners, notably the European Union, are today more important than ever. My conviction, knowing both organisations very well, is that the European Union should make better use of the experience, institutions and instruments of the Council of Europe. The present debate on the creation of an EU Human Rights Agency is a good example. As a member of the Convention which prepared the Constitutional Treaty for Europe, I feel strongly about the importance of the Council of Europe in many areas of concern to the European Union. The European Union’s neighbourhood policy could be so much more effective if a better and more systematic use were made of the Council of Europe framework.

The accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights and the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty will link Europe’s most advanced institution to Europe’s oldest and widest organisation. It will also be a
major step towards the creation of a common European legal area. The recent appointment of an Ambassador to the Council of Europe by the European Commission is already to be warmly welcomed. But, as Foreign Minister Asselborn said during his presentation of the Luxembourg EU Presidency’s priorities, we do hope we will very soon see the establishment of a permanent Office of the Commission in Strasbourg.

As regards the European Parliament, many of its members are former members of our Assembly. We should benefit from their unique double experience.

There must be no new dividing lines in Europe, nor a return to old East-West antagonisms. There is only one, single, Europe. And here I would quote Jacques Delors, who said: “Pour ma part, je suggère trois objectifs pour cette Grande Europe : un espace de paix active, un cadre pour un développement durable, et enfin un espace de valeurs vécues dans la diversité de nos cultures et de nos traditions”.

This Europe is an important part of the international community, as embodied in the United Nations and its specialised agencies, with which we co-operate in many fields. We should strongly promote our values at the global level and stand ready to act as a regional organisation when needed.

With the OSCE, we should emphasise our respective comparative advantages and continue to seek complementarity and reduce all duplication of efforts.

Our Observers offer important input to our work for which we should be very grateful. I look forward to continued close co-operation with them. In the Middle East, new hopes for peace have arisen and we shall make our contribution wherever possible.

Regrettably, one observer state of the Council of Europe – the United States – does not participate in the work of the Assembly. I shall continue the efforts of my predecessors to involve our parliamentary colleagues in Washington in our activities.

We should also stand ready to co-operate with other regions of the world. I intend to build on the work of President Schieder as regards the Pan-African Parliament, and also to develop personal contacts with those fellow parliamentarians elsewhere, who are interested in our experience.

My third priority, the Council of Europe’s Third Summit, scheduled to take place in Warsaw on 16 and 17 May this year, is a crucial event for the future of the Council of Europe. It should provide this Organisation with a clear political mission for the years to come. It should provide guidance for more effective cooperation between the different European institutions. I look forward to discussing with the Committee of Ministers the proposals for the Summit that the Assembly will adopt this week, on the basis of the challenging report presented by Mr Kosachev. I have full confidence that the Polish Chairmanship will make this Summit a success.

I call on all national parliaments to hold debates on the Council of Europe’s Third Summit and to encourage their governments to follow the recommendations we shall adopt this week. Such political momentum generated at national level is indispensable, if the Summit is to be successful.

Equally important for its success will be the allocation of adequate resources to implement the decisions taken. Zero real growth would starve this organisation. The current budget for this Assembly equals that of my favourite football team, Roda JC, in my province in the Netherlands. It also conveys the impression of a lack of interest in the important role the Council of Europe can and must play. Again, this requires our vigilance as national parliamentarians.

In this, and in carrying out the high office to which you have elected me, I very much count on your support.

The Council of Europe is the oldest European organisation. Age is an asset if the experience gained remains based on the ideals of our founding fathers. Let us stand up for our ideals and promote them with enthusiasm. The Council of Europe is not an antechamber for other institutions. It is not a technical agency. It is a vital international organisation with a remarkably active and concerned Parliamentary Assembly, and this thanks to so many of you in this chamber here today. This is our capital, our richness, in which we should invest for the peace and welfare of Europe.

We should set the example if we wish others to follow. Thank you.
Mr President, Excellencies,
May I first, once again, thank you for the excellent and successful organisation of this Summit. Why are we here in Warsaw? Because in the European Architecture of tomorrow the Council of Europe has a crucial role to play. It is the only Pan-European Organisation. And it will remain the only Pan-European Organisation for many years to come. And, as so many of you said yesterday and today, it is doing an excellent job.
The unfolding tragedy in Uzbekistan is a reminder of what happens if our values are not respected. We should do our utmost to contribute to a peaceful settlement. Lessons should be drawn to enable Europe to prevent such crises from re-occurring.
In 1949, when the Council of Europe was set up, many were opposed to creating a Parliamentary Assembly. From today’s perspective, it is clear that the creation of the Assembly was essential to the success of the Council of Europe. Every time the Assembly takes on additional competence this has paid off and moves the European idea forward – and closer to its citizens.
The members of the Assembly have a double mandate: European and national. This enables us not only to bring national parliaments to Europe, but also to bring Europe to national parliaments, and thus to the people. Closer to their views, hopes, ideas, and criticisms.
Regrettably, today many of our citizens consider European architecture to be more an office building for bureaucrats rather than a home for themselves. We need to re-connect Europe with its citizens.
We must apply the principle of subsidiarity, also to international institutions, to avoid duplication and waste of money. Decisions should be taken at the most appropriate level; that is by the best-placed institution.
The Council of Europe has unique and proven mechanisms and instruments for the protection of human rights. They should not be undermined. Recent initiatives within the European Commission, in particular concerning the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, if pursued, will create unnecessary duplication and draw new dividing lines in Europe.
Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner this morning recognised the excellent work of the Council of Europe and expressed the Commission’s intention to make full use of our instruments and mechanisms in the neighbourhood policy. The Assembly will soon submit concrete proposals on how to make this intention a reality.
The mandates of the European Union, the OSCE and the Council of Europe need to be defined. Each has its own specific role.
Your decisions at this Summit clearly set out the Council of Europe’s political mandate. I strongly appeal to you to recall these decisions when instructing your representatives in our partner organisations, in particular, the European Union and the OSCE.
I attach the greatest importance to good co-operation with the European Union. I am extremely grateful to Prime Minister Juncker for having just agreed to prepare a political report on the relations between the European Union and the Council of Europe. I am sure that he will provide the right answers. He can count on the Assembly’s contribution and our strong political support.
When discussing relations between the European Union and the Council of Europe, the parliamentary dimension must, of course, be present.
Together with the European Parliament, the Assembly should therefore be a full participant in the Quadripartite meetings between the European Union and the Council of Europe. I count on you to make this possible.
In European relations, parliamentary diplomacy has become an irreplaceable tool. It is one of the strengths of our Assembly.
Moreover, for Europe’s political leaders, our Assembly has become a school for democracy. It should be more regularly consulted by the Committee of Ministers and be closer involved in the preparation of conventions.
The Assembly needs increased budgetary rights, similar to those enjoyed by international assemblies.
This should include verification of the Organisation’s spending in order that we can also contribute to an even better use of the resources and to the strengthening of our work.
We are, after all, in the same boat. This will enable us to be more convincing in our national parliaments when defending the budgetary needs of our Organisation.
I intend to work more closely with the Committee of Ministers and I appeal to you to make this possible.
In conclusion, we need:
Firstly, much stronger co-operation with international organisations, in particular with the European Union; Mr Juncker’s report will certainly provide us with the necessary roadmap;
Secondly, a much stronger Parliamentary Assembly; Thirdly, more effective co-operation with the Committee of Ministers. I count on your support.

Speech on the occasion of the centenary of the Russian State Duma (St Petersburg, 27 April 2006)

Zdravstvuite, dorogiye druzya,
It is a great honour for me to greet you on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the State Duma.
Standing here, I find myself thinking about my Dutch ancestors, who played such a role in Peter the Great’s decision to choose a European orientation for Russia more than 300 years ago, following his stay in Zaandam and Amsterdam at the end of the 17th century.
This European choice was given concrete expression in the foundation of this magnificent city of St Petersburg, where a “window to Europe” was opened – only to be closed in 1917.
Saint Petersburg, which for 900 days resisted with the greatest heroism the Nazi invaders.
Crucial events in Russia’s great history have taken place within the walls of this Palace: the home of Prince Potemkin, of the first Russian Duma and of the Soviet of workers’ and soldiers’ representatives.
Today, we witness a truly historical moment – a democratic State Duma is sitting here, writing a new chapter in Russian history – the chapter of democracy.
I would therefore like to take this unique opportunity to express my support for and belief in a strategic, all-encompassing partnership with Russia.
Dear friends,
Russia is fully a part of Europe and Europe’s future is closely linked to the possibility of building a real partnership.
When I became President of the Parliamentary Assembly in January last year, I stressed the importance of ensuring close, permanent and friendly relations with Russia.
During my four visits to your country since being elected, it has been clear that my commitment to a strong partnership is shared by so many of your representatives and people, on so many levels.
Now is the time to give an extra impetus to this commitment.

Today, as President of the Assembly, I wish to reach out my hand to all of you and mark – from this prestigious tribune – important steps in our roadmap towards friendship and partnership with mutual respect and on an equal footing.
We must shift our focus away from the past and accept that we are dependent on each other. A common future must, therefore, be our main aim, as well as being the instrument to realise our other goals.
I believe a prosperous common future, in the interest of all Europeans, can be developed if we choose the right building blocks for our roadmap.
First, we need to strengthen mutual trust and confidence. This is crucial for working together in the future. We need to overcome the suspicions of the past to find confidence in one another and in the future. Of course this will take time and patience, but with mutual respect, we can make a big leap forward.
Second, co-operation on an equal footing is the key to success. Nowadays, our relations are too often characterised by criticism. We all know that criticism can only be experienced as constructive if there is mutual trust and knowledge. If we can make it that far, criticism will even become assistance.
Our third building block should be stability and durability. And I mean on every possible level: economic, social, cultural, scientific and so on.
We should work together to create stability on the European continent; I am talking about peace building and finding solutions to conflicts. Both Russia and the rest of Europe need to shoulder their responsibilities for solving conflicts and consolidating peace. A partnership, therefore, is absolutely vital and let’s be honest: working together is also the most practical and efficient way.
We need to strengthen the human dimension of our co-operation – we need more “people to people” contacts, in particular in the fields of culture, research, sport and education. For this, people in Europe must be able to move more freely between East and West. On the economic level the EU and Russia should step up efforts to give more impetus to the implementation of the EU-Russia space, to make it broader, more efficient and more meaningful.
The Council of Europe, however, is not about economics – it is above all a community of values. And that brings me to my final building block, the keystone: our core and common values. Values that are not just important in themselves, because I can assure you that human rights, democracy and the rule of law
are the prerequisites for prosperity, peace, stability and economic growth. The rule of law and predictability are, for example, fundamental requirements for investors seeking improvement of the investment climate. These values are the basis on which we can and should build our joint roadmap, and with that the future of the entire European continent.

For the future to be successful, we must not only value these four building blocks, but we especially have to use them at every opportunity. We have to make sure that together, we give them practical content. When we are discussing co-operation mechanisms, the setting up of joint programmes or simply working together – in, for example, the cultural, sports or youth fields – we must work with the blocks that will pave the way for co-operation. At the same time, as real partners, we all have to assume our responsibilities for peaceful solution of conflicts and for peace and security in the world.

We have to invest much more in this partnership. It is, to my mind, the most important and challenging mission for all of us in the years to come. Your decision to join the Council of Europe 10 years ago was, and still is, a clear choice to share our common values.

During these 10 years, you have achieved remarkable progress in strengthening and developing democracy in Russia. I pay the highest tribute to the Russian people for these democratic reforms, which have been undertaken in difficult political circumstances and during a period of economic transition.

When Russia joined the Council of Europe, it meant endorsing the values of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. The values I believe to be the umbrella for our partnership and the co-ordinating part of our roadmap. I know however that there are voices in your country claiming that these values are so-called Western values, not suitable for Russia because they might destabilize your society.

Let me tell you, there is no such thing as “Western values”: there are only universal human values.

The challenges confronting our societies in today’s fast-developing and interdependent world – such as terrorism, trafficking in human beings, organised crime and corruption, poverty, social exclusion and lack of opportunities – can only be dealt with if we reinforce our commitment to these universal values. With that, we can build a stronger civil society that will grow yet stronger with free media, free and fair elections, an open debate and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

But my main plea to you today, when talking of our common values, is to take the crucial and historic step to abolish the death penalty. In 2006, Russia is the only member of the Council of Europe not to have ratified Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights. Would it not be the most fitting tribute to our common values, to the basis of our co-operation, to abolish the death penalty in this centenary year of the Duma and especially a hundred years after it was first proposed by the Duma? I believe it would.

Dear friends,

Russia will soon take the chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It will be the first time Russia chairs a European democratic organisation. Russia must seize this opportunity to strengthen its role on the European international scene. We must use this Russian Chairmanship as the starting point of our roadmap to a fully-fledged partnership on the European continent.

Your delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly is doing a remarkable job to help make this Chairmanship a success. I have excellent relations with members of this delegation, but may I mention, in particular, Mr Kosachev, Vice-Chairman of the Assembly, Mr Margelov, and Mr Slutsky, who have become real friends.

I took today’s opportunity to reconfirm my commitment to a Europe based on real partnership and have therefore presented to you four crucial conditions for our roadmap to a common future:

- a partnership with mutual trust and confidence
- a partnership on an equal footing
- a common aim of stability and durability
- the acceptance of implementation of our common values

As President of the Assembly, I will do my utmost to observe these conditions and to work by them. It is my responsibility and duty to ensure that, within the Parliamentary Assembly, these conditions will be pursued and met. It will take time and patience, but I do sincerely hope that on the next centenary, our successors can truly speak of a successful partnership that has benefited all European citizens.

On our common road to success, there are no old or new dividing lines in Europe. As your President, Mr Putin, said: “Today, at the beginning of the new millennium, we must, we are obliged to use this unique opportunity to make Europe a model of a civilized relationship, a model of joint efforts of our countries.”

Or as Bismarck said: “The secret of politics? Make a good treaty with Russia.”

Let’s do it together.

Sparab za vamnaniye.
Ladies and gentlemen,
We have met today to speak about democracy. Democracy needs freedom: freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of assembly and association, the freedom to vote in free and fair elections and, above all, freedom of information and expression. Therefore, from this tribune, I wish to express my shock and deep sadness at the assassination of one of the most courageous journalists in Russia, Mrs Anna Politkovskaya.
She did outstanding work as a journalist and we will always remember her.
As I said in my immediate comment after the killing, journalistic freedom is one of the pillars of democracy, so attacking journalists is an attack on democracy itself.
It is now absolutely essential that the Russian authorities carry out a thorough investigation in order to bring those responsible to justice and I will use my stay in Moscow, all my meetings, to put my authority behind this demand.
In all countries, state authorities are responsible not only for the legal framework for journalism, but also for the general climate in which journalists are working.
States must create conditions for journalists to work freely and independently.
We cannot accept a situation where the most courageous individuals make themselves possible targets because of their commitment to the principle of the freedom of the media.
Dear colleagues,
Democracy means, from the point of view of values, fundamental freedoms, respect for human rights and the rule of law – these principles have now been generally accepted as the indispensable conditions for economic growth and the material well-being of our citizens.
Institutionally, democracy depends to a large extent on the functioning of political parties, which are the necessary link between the government and the people.
But the people need to know that their participation counts.
They need to know that it is worthwhile to follow debates, to take an interest in election campaigns, to vote.
For politicians to represent the people, persons from all walks of life must be inspired to join political parties and to stand for election to public office.
If not, a gap emerges between the electorate and the politicians.
There is growing concern about this gap in many European countries, and we must find out the reasons for it.
We must involve citizens in political life, in order to restore an effective decision-making process.
Increasingly, politicians are not exercising leadership, with the result that the political process lacks credibility.
To be able to exercise this leadership, politicians must fight for their ideas and programmes - not for their jobs, since they must be driven by the sense of public service, and not by the wish to stay in office.
But, above all, politicians must be examples for citizens – examples of integrity and honesty. People must trust their politicians - therefore honesty is the basic requirement for being a politician.
Lying to our citizens, for whatever reason, must never be accepted.
I insist on the personal and professional qualities of individual politicians, because it is the determining factor behind the quality of political parties.
I fully agree that we need a code of conduct for politicians – and my colleague Mikko Elo, our general rapporteur, will further develop these ideas in a couple of minutes.
However, no formal tool can replace the fairest selection and regulatory mechanism, which is the free vote of the people.
Free and fair elections are the pre-requisite of every democratic system.
For the Parliamentary Assembly, observing elections is one of our most important activities.
Let me underline one fact the Assembly has never been in favour of any single candidate or party.
We stand only for the respect of democratic principles, and then we must be ready to accept the outcome of such elections.
I said that in the case of the presidential elections in Ukraine in December 2004, and I said it again in the case of the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council this year.
Dear colleagues,
In a nutshell, my message addressed to us, as politicians, is the following:
1/ we must unconditionally respect the fundamental values and freedoms in all circumstances, including the freedom of media, which is the essential public corrective mechanism of political life;
2/ we must have the courage to defend these values even in cases when a majority of our citizens have a different opinion – take the issue of the death penalty for example: the
death penalty is unacceptable, even if, in many countries, it still has wide support;

3/ we must be an example to our citizens, both in private and public life, as regards the essential human values of integrity, honesty and compassion;

Lies and corruption, in particular, damage the very foundations of our democracies, because they destroy the vital link of trust between the people and those who govern in their name.

4/ we must compete with our ideas and programmes in fair and free elections;

5/ we must respect the diversity of political opinions and respect the opposition;

6/ we need to stay close to civil society, which is systematically providing new ideas and constructive criticism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the second part of my statement, I should like to develop my ideas and proposals as to how the “Forum for the Future of Democracy” - this very mechanism which brought us to Moscow today - should become a real tool in promoting democracy.

At the first Forum meeting in Warsaw, I concluded that the future Forum meetings must be:

- diverse and representative - a bridge between different groups in society;
- autonomous and pro-active;
- flexible and creative.

You may know that the Forum itself was originally an initiative of the Assembly, namely of our colleague, a Polish MP, Mr Wielowieski, to whom I pay tribute today.

In my opinion, the Forum must be based on the following principles:

1/ it needs to bring together the widest possible variety of parties with a real and immediate interest: civil society, journalists, academics, politicians and political parties, civil servants, and so on.

There must be a proper balance between these groups, in order to achieve genuine, pluralistic representation of society as a whole.

2/ it must not duplicate the work of the Council of Europe’s existing organs and mechanisms, namely the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Liaison Committee for the international NGOs that enjoy participatory status.

I said in Warsaw that these bodies do not need to be duplicated, they must be involved.

Today, after the experience with the organisation of the two Forum meetings, I would take my proposal even further.

The bodies with democratic legitimacy must not only be involved, they must be in charge of running the Forum for Democracy.

Whenever this principle is not respected, for whatever reasons, it is the quality of discussion which suffers.

I have, therefore, already suggested that the Parliamentary Assembly should make an evaluation of the first two Forum meetings and take a new initiative with a view of fully developing the great potential of this wonderful and useful idea.

In this connection, I wish to pay credit to the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers which, without any hesitation, proposed that the State Duma should be the organiser of this Forum on the Russian side.

May I take this occasion to thank the Russian Chairmanship, namely:

- on the parliamentary side, the Speakers of both Houses, Mr Gryzlov and Mr Mironov, and the parliamentary delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly led by Mr Kosachev;
- on the governmental side, the Foreign Minister, Mr Lavrov, and Ambassador Orlov in Strasbourg, for their firm and consistent support of the parliamentary dimension in European and international affairs.

To be completely frank, I am, at times, surprised by the resistance of so-called “old democracies” when it comes to meaningfully involving parliaments in the essential parts of the Council of Europe’s business, such as the budget of the Organisation, referring to the Statute adopted more that 50 years ago and not taking into account democratic developments since then.

Dear colleagues,

I have tried to be extremely open and sincere in my address, because I think that as politicians, we stand at a decisive crossroads.

Statistics show that more and more people are turning away from public life, considering that politicians and the political parties are increasingly becoming “joint-stock companies”, taking care mostly of their share-holders - members of the party - instead of the interests of the citizens.

We can see a similar tendency at the European scale as well – more and more people turn away from European political affairs to their purely domestic agenda.

The easiest way to deal with this situation would be to blame our citizens for it – but this would be the wrong way.

We must look at ourselves, at our political parties, and start the hard work to reverse this tendency.

We must go back to our citizens, young people, students and associations with a view to
ensuring their fullest involvement in public affairs. It is also necessary to adapt to the era of globalisation and intensify party-building at trans-national level: if economic, social and cultural issues become increasingly global, politicians and their parties cannot stand behind.

In this connection, politicians must correctly understand new developments and challenges - therefore, political parties need input by high-quality expert "think-tanks", whose role is not to replace the politicians, but to provide them with new and innovative ideas. Democracy is a wonderful thing, it is our duty to make it thrive. The Council of Europe has a central role in assisting all European countries, and in particular those where democracy has been re-established only recently, to build their political, economic and social systems on the respect of the same fundamental values. I believe that this meeting in Moscow will be a useful step in this direction. Thank you for your attention.

Speech delivered at the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly (Sibiu, Romania, 6 September 2007)

Your Holiness, Eminences, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address and take part in this conference. Part of this pleasure, of course, lies in the location – this beautiful city of Sibiu, whose status is reflected in its being one of this year’s European capitals of culture. The important contemporary issues this Assembly is addressing – such as peace and justice, European unity and integration, migration, intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the relationship between religion and public life – are constantly on the agenda of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. They go to the heart of the European model, of our great and exciting European project. Europe is a continent not just of progress and development; it is just as importantly a continent of heritage and tradition. If European construction is to continue, it must be built on solid foundations; if we are to understand and meet the new challenges of a globalising world, we must first know and understand ourselves.

Day by day, technology is shrinking time and distance. But even as the world comes together, we are far too often ignorant of, even indifferent towards other peoples and cultures. By overcoming this ignorance, however – above all, by recognising and respecting our common humanity – we can build mutual trust and avoid prejudice and misunderstanding. For our common humanity is the basis of the natural right to respect for human dignity, a right that underlies all human rights. Whilst individual rights are essential to respect for human dignity, they need also the acceptance of responsibilities. Through education, culture and the media, we need to develop a stronger sense of social conscience and public spirit. We, as politicians and the representatives of the Churches, cannot accept the continuing existence of these phenomena, which are also amongst the root causes of exclusion and extremism. The other side of this ugly coin can be seen in the avarice and naked greed that award grotesque bonuses to an obscenely over-privileged few. The European project – a product of our cultural and historical heritage, whose goal is to ensure peace, justice and individual dignity – was never intended merely to promote economic growth. Its fundamental principles, however – respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law – are the essential preconditions for peace, stability and prosperity. This is why the Council of Europe, as a value community, was the first European political organisation to be established after the Second World War, and why we remain as vital and relevant as ever. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Council of Europe led the way in forging a new Europe without dividing lines. Today, we continue this historic mission, bringing Russia and the other former communist countries – the sole, and regrettable exception being Belarus – into a close, co-operative strategic partnership with the rest of Europe; a partnership of equality based on shared acceptance of our common values – democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
From Iceland to Vladivostok, from Norway to Turkey, we are leading the struggle on contemporary issues such as terrorism, trafficking in human beings, domestic violence, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, respect for the rights of national and other minorities and respect for the rights of refugees and migrants.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Last month I paid an official visit to the Middle East, where I met the leaders of the religious institutions of Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

Jew, Muslim and Christian, they joined together in a call for religious heritage around the world to be given effective, international protection, in all circumstances, whether war or peace.

I fully support their plea, for I have seen myself how the wanton destruction of religious sites causes deep emotional wounds: sharpening hatred, fuelling conflict and obstructing the search for peace.

I now intend to initiate work in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for an international instrument to prevent such outrages from occurring again in the future.

Faith, religion and religious organisations play a vital, vibrant role in society, binding the social fabric together.

Through their profound respect for individual human dignity, they are indispensable to advancing peace and justice in the world.

I believe that politicians must recognise this and strengthen the role of churches and religious organisations in society.

Politicians must not interfere in the affairs of Churches and religious organisations, however, just as religion must be kept separate from politics.

But both are directly concerned with values in society and public life; and by complementing one another, they can achieve more through cooperation than they can apart.

One of the most important social and political challenges of today – and the best remedy for the ignorance that causes tension and conflict – is intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has shown how, with the right approach, a political institution can do a great deal to meet this challenge.

With 318 elected representatives from the national parliaments of our 47 member states, we encompass all of the cultures and religions of Europe, making us a privileged, natural forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

We receive addresses by world religious leaders, such as Patriarch Bartholomew and, in October, Patriarch Alexis – and I should also mention our invitation to Pope Benedict XVI – as well as statesmen such as Mr Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey, who spoke about the Alliance of Civilisations.

The newly-elected President of Turkey, Mr Gül, will address our next part-session in Strasbourg in the first week of October.

As President, I have addressed many high-level international conferences, and brought together national religious leaders during my official visits to conflict-torn places such as the Balkans, Cyprus, the south Caucasus and the Holy Land.

The Council of Europe does not have military forces or even the leverage that comes through trade and economic policies.

But through the credibility and moral authority that come with our mandatory focus on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, we have a soft power that can prove just as effective.

Our soft power manifests itself in subtle ways – through dialogue and parliamentary diplomacy, for instance, whereby Assembly members, sharing a pan-European forum in the home of democracy, can take a flexible approach to international questions, free of the restraints of government policy and instructions.

Similarly, the ongoing reporting processes of the Council’s various monitoring mechanisms are in themselves important occasions for dialogue.

In this way, we can build bridges - sometimes small ones, but always meaningful ones.

Indeed, we are seeing more and more how this soft power can and must play a leading role in conflict prevention and resolution, alongside – and sometimes before – military force.

Last week, we held a joint meeting of the political group leaders of the Assembly and the European Parliament, as a result of which we have agreed to co-organise a high-profile conference on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue next year.

I would therefore also like to congratulate the organisers of this Assembly as an excellent example of what can be achieved.

I hope that all of you here this week can be brought into this vital process and that the future will see us working ever more closely together, for the good of us all and for the future of our children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Democracy, the rule of law and human rights are the pillars of the Council of Europe, on which we are building a common European house.

This gives us the best guarantee for a stable, peaceful and prosperous future.
On our way to this future, Churches are our indispensable partners.
We need ethical values to make our political life more respectable and respectful of people.
We must reinforce political and legal action by co-operation with confessional organisations.
We must do everything to raise mutual understanding and respect among different cultures and religions.
We must put intercultural and inter-religious dialogue at the top of the political agenda in all our member states.
We must work together for peace, social justice and long-term stability, thus also severing the root causes of extremism and terrorism.
Thank you.

Opening speech delivered at the October 2007 part-session
(Strasbourg, 1 October 2007)

Friends, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,
Welcome back to Strasbourg for our autumn part-session. I hope that you have all passed a relaxing and enjoyable summer. This will be the last plenary session during which I will address you from this chair. I am very pleased that my final session will contain memorable highlights.

Amongst our many highly distinguished guest speakers – testament to the growing profile and prestige of our Assembly - I would mention in particular the presence of Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow and All-Russia and President Abdullah Gül of Turkey.

And I can also now announce that Chancellor Merkel has accepted my invitation to address the Assembly, which she will do next April.

Amongst our debates this week, that on the political consequences of the “rocket shield,” a crucial issue for pan-European unity and stability, will be especially topical and interesting.

Since our last part-session, I have conducted several significant and extremely interesting visits as President.

In Paris, I discussed the future of the Council of Europe and relations with the host state with various high officials of state.

Shortly after, I visited Russia: in Moscow, I addressed the Council of Europe-supported School of Political Studies and met Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov and Patriarch Alexy II; in the regions, I promoted the Council of Europe and our common values in meetings with a wide variety of interlocutors.

In both our member states of the South Caucasus and our neighbours in the Middle East, I encouraged greater use of the Assembly’s potential for parliamentary diplomacy as a means to resolve frozen conflicts and avoid new sources of tension.

I then attended the important European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania, where I promoted the Assembly as a natural forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Most recently, I visited the three Baltic states, where I encouraged better relations between majority and minority communities and a more positive, forward-looking attitude towards their neighbour Russia.

I am very pleased that, in my last session as President, our activities this week, and my own activities over the summer, so closely reflect many of the priorities of my presidency.

I have tried to ensure that the Assembly focuses more consistently on our core business – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – in particular by:
- encouraging committees to clarify their annual priorities and adapt their agendas accordingly;

The Annual Report was also a high-profile, public opportunity to underline our excellent co-operation with the Organisation’s other leading bodies, including the Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, the Venice Commission, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Committee of Social Rights.

I have endeavoured to promote the potential of the Council of Europe as the only pan-European democratic organisation and the most capable of unifying all Europe around common values, thereby preventing the emergence of new dividing lines.

To this end, I have devoted particular attention to our newer member states and those that are not members of the European Union.

In this connection, my efforts to enhance relations with Russia reflect that country’s unique historical and geographical circumstances:
- the importance of looking to the future instead of dwelling on the tragedies of the past; and
- the need to recognise that Russia faces unique geopolitical strategic challenges, which require a special strategic relationship with the rest of Europe.
I have sought to take full advantage of the Assembly’s unique potential for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, including by giving the floor to international religious leaders and promoting closer relations with religious and faith-based organisations. Similarly, our value-based mandate, our institutional role within the Council of Europe, our geographical scope and our political plurality make us a natural partner for non-governmental organisations and other civil society bodies. Our leading and innovative role in these fields has made us a model for regional assemblies elsewhere in the world.

We helped to develop the Asian Parliamentary Assembly, whose current President will address us this week; and during the remainder of my mandate, I intend to strengthen our links with regional assemblies in Africa and Latin America.

I would also add the question of relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union and between the Assembly and the European Parliament. We must never forget the big differences between the Council of Europe and the European Union when it comes to human rights. For the EU, human rights in the rest of Europe are external relations; their activities in this area are often perceived as interference in internal affairs by non-EU member states. But for the Council of Europe, these same states are member states; voluntarily bound by their obligations and commitments.

The other difference is that human rights are at the heart of our statutory mandate; which is why we were able to institute a European Day against the Death Penalty – a decision for which I wholeheartedly congratulate the Committee of Ministers – where the European Union was blocked by the indefensible actions of Poland.

At the Warsaw Summit soon after my Presidency began, the Assembly was at the origin of the initiative that led to Prime Minister Juncker’s report; since then, I have pushed hard for his recommendations to be implemented by the Committee of Ministers.

I vehemently opposed the creation of a European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights as creating a threat to the integrity of Council of Europe activities and wasting huge sums of tax-payers’ money. I argued strongly for the Memorandum of Understanding to give proper recognition to the role and status of the Council of Europe, so that the European Union would be required to take full account of our instruments, standards and mechanisms in the field of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Most recently, the joint meeting between our Presidential Committee and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament has given fresh impetus to conclusion of an agreement on closer co-operation within the parliamentary dimension of European politics.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are a unique organisation, with unique instruments and mechanisms and unrivalled experience and expertise in our core activities – democracy, human rights and the rule of law. But I am becoming more and more concerned about the situation in which the Assembly and the Council of Europe’s other indispensable bodies find themselves.

The foremost problem facing this organisation is its member states’ attitude towards the budget. Of course, the Council of Europe must be run properly and responsibly, with an eye to avoiding waste. But if cost-cutting is the only clear priority of management, then the quality of our work will inevitably suffer.

I am convinced that member states seriously undervalue our activities and potential. There is a very real risk that we will enter a vicious circle of budget-cutting, followed by criticism of the quality of certain under-funded activities, followed by yet more budget-cutting. Set against this attitude, it is quite absurd that the European Union – whose members now constitute a majority in the Council of Europe – saw fit to establish the completely unnecessary Agency for Fundamental Rights.

It has been quite obvious since the start that this Agency’s potential to duplicate Council of Europe activities is far greater than its potential to provide any real added value. If human rights are a real priority for member states – and not just an opportunity for political posturing – then they have to put their money where their mouths are; and most importantly, they have to put it where it will do the most good, into the Council of Europe.

On the other hand, it does not matter how good we are if nobody knows what we do. The Organisation’s communications policy is failing to do justice to the quality of our activities. We also need to reform the institutional structure of the Council of Europe. The organisation as a whole would become much more dynamic and creative if there was a more balanced partnership between the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers.

Whether minister, parliamentarian or diplomat, we share the same values and work within the same organisation devoted to promoting those values.
Whilst recognising our organisation’s intergovernmental nature and the Committee of Ministers’ executive function, therefore, it is crucial that the complementary role of the Assembly be properly appreciated and respected.

As independent parliamentarians, we have greater flexibility, greater freedom to use our imaginations than those who represent governments.

Our potential for open and inclusive debate; our role in facilitating parliamentary diplomacy; our activities in promoting conflict resolution – in these respects, we are outstanding. Our ability to exploit these qualities to the full would be much greater if the Assembly had a larger say in matters such as the budget and human resources – indeed, the Assembly should have its own budget.

I must say quite frankly that I consider the current human resources policies of the Council of Europe to be damaging to the organisation’s activities and to its future prospects.

We have highly committed and talented staff, but I fear that the organisation is failing to motivate them and is thus failing to maximise their potential.

The way in which staff are recruited, the way in which careers are managed and the way in which talent is encouraged and promoted are completely inadequate for an organisation as important as ours.

In particular, the Assembly needs far greater flexibility and autonomy in human resources management: it is unacceptable that neither the President nor the Bureau have any say in appointments to senior grades in the Assembly secretariat.

This is not the case for the Committee of Ministers, for the Court or for the Commissioner – why should it be the case for us?

We are and must be an inherently political organisation and therefore – as Prime Minister Juncker said – in all the most important positions, we need people with the right political profiles: by which I mean the necessary vision, authority and networks of outside contacts, not particular political views or allegiances.

Prime Minister Juncker also pointed out the need for greater involvement of foreign ministers, who are politicians, in the work of the Committee of Ministers – so as to give more effective political initiative and leadership to their deputies, who are diplomats.

The Council of Europe must have a political vision and profile if we are to ensure that the promotion and protection of our common values is always at the top of the European political agenda.

This commitment to values is why I have worked for the Assembly during my time as President with all of my strength, passion and conviction.

After so many years’ experience of European affairs, I can say that my feelings for the European Union come from my head, but my love of the Council of Europe comes from my heart.

We deal not with trade, or economics, or defence, but with the most important things in life: with human beings, and with human dignity and the rights that flow from it.

This does not give us easy subjects to work with – we deal with the hard realities of life, often the suffering and misery of real people, and I hope that in this most important of respects, we will continue to make a difference.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This morning, the Bureau adopted a formal declaration calling for an immediate end to the Burmese authorities’ brutal crackdown on peaceful protests.

The appalling and unjustifiable violence with which the military junta is attempting to crush the demonstrations must be condemned in the strongest terms by all the international community, without exception, as a flagrant violation of international law.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by saying how immensely proud I am to be President of such a body of highly principled and committed parliamentarians.

I sincerely hope that I have proved worthy of the confidence that you placed in me by electing me to this prestigious office.

And

I can assure you that, for the remainder of my mandate, I will remain as vigorous in promoting the Assembly as I have always been.

Thank you.
Mr Ambassador,  
Friends,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  

It gives me pleasure to think that the two most enthralling offices I have held in my long political career have both been purely honorary. Indeed, the happiest times of my professional life have been spent as a member of the European Convention and as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

I am therefore deeply honoured and touched to receive, in the name of the President of the Republic, this exceptional award in recognition of my dedication to the European cause and to closer ties of friendship between our two countries.

I am deeply touched by this signal mark of distinction because France, for me, is not just a country like the others. This is the country where the European idea was born, developed and grew, supported by the efforts of numerous illustrious figures. Victor Hugo himself said in 1849:

“A day will come when you, France, you, Russia, you, Italy, you, England, you, Germany, you, all the nations of the continent, without losing your distinctive qualities and your glorious individuality, will be tightly fused in a higher unity, and will constitute the European brotherhood.”

Now there’s a man to whom I would gladly have surrendered my place as President of the Parliamentary Assembly! To Victor Hugo, I would add Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet, Jacques Delors… And each succeeding generation leaves the list longer. For them, Europe was very real. They understood that turning one’s back on one’s neighbours was madness. That it was madness to ignore them. To turn them into caricatures. To judge them at first sight. To make no attempt to get to know them better.

The role of the Council of Europe and the European ideal  
To put out one’s hand out across frontiers. How often I have thought this, after spending close on three years travelling throughout “Greater Europe”: from Estonia to Spain, from Turkey to Russia. Getting to know one another better. Learning to respect one another.

Coming together on the basis of shared, intangible values. Fighting to win respect for those values. Tenaciously. And sometimes patiently too, depending on the historical background. This is the Council of Europe’s job. A job that is under-rated. A job focused on human beings. A job that the European Union should learn to value more. Because it makes a vital contribution to building and consolidating a democratic Europe, which respects human rights. That is why I am glad that President Sarkozy paid tribute in Strasbourg last week to the work of all the European parliamentary assemblies, and referred to one of my predecessors at the helm of the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, Paul Henri Spaak.

The Council of Europe’s work has never been as necessary as it is today in combating the growing threat of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. At a time when concern for security is tempting some of our democracies to go astray. At a time when past conflicts are a source of new tension. Think of the Armenian genocide, or of Russia’s occupation of the countries of the East. In the face of these dangers, the Council of Europe offers us a common home. It offers us a forum we can use to develop intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. To avert fresh divisions more effectively. Because Europe must not be used to satisfy anyone’s desire for revenge. Must not be instrumentalised or exploited by vote-catchers.

Europe remains a marvellous adventure, since it has robbed age-old conflicts between its peoples of their inevitability. Go anywhere in the world and you will find such conflicts: in Palestine as in Iraq. Having learned from its experience, Europe has served, and must continue to serve, peace, reconciliation and democracy. Within and beyond its frontiers. But let us never forget that the only basis of our moral authority is the example we set others.

Yes, Europe is a demanding ideal. An ideal which demands women and men of conviction, ambition and imagination. Women and men who can win our people, and especially our young people, to the cause. We must also learn to speak more eloquently of Europe. To touch the hearts and minds of our fellow-Europeans. I am thinking of the excellent series of programmes, “In Europa”, inspired by Geert Mak’s book, currently being shown on Dutch television.

No, Europe does not stop with European Union. In 1949, the founders of the Council of Europe, like the later founders of the European Union, were trying by their efforts to ensure that war would never again set the continent ablaze.
Since 1989, Europe’s geopolitical situation has changed radically. Our new task now is to ensure that fresh divisions do not emerge in our continent. The Council of Europe has a major role to play here. Particularly since its membership includes Russia and Turkey, two countries of vital importance for Europe’s future.

Turkey
Concerning relations between Turkey and the European Union, I would like to remind you that the negotiations on accession are based on reciprocal obligations. It will take 10 to 15 years to fulfill the conditions for accession. And in 15 years’ time, the world will have changed a great deal. In the meantime, both sides stand to gain by working in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect and understanding.

Revitalising the European project
In Strasbourg last week, President Sarkozy declared: “I have made putting France back at the heart of the European project one of my priorities. Even though Europe has become more complex since enlargement, sound co-operation between France and Germany remains essential to its progress. The greatest strides have been made when the two countries have succeeded in working together. I am thinking of the things done by Chancellor Kohl and President Mitterrand, to whom I pay tribute this evening”.

That is why I am delighted to see President Sarkozy and Chancellor Merkel anxious to work hand-in-hand to revitalise the European process. In particular, I hope that the next few years will see the emergence of a genuine European defence system.

Without the work of the Convention, the simplified treaty would never have been possible. We now have the basis we need to co-operate more closely, more easily. This we need to do, since there is no avoiding a two-speed Europe if we want to progress in certain strategic areas. In fact, we have it already. Without a two-speed Europe, we would not have Schengen, we would not have the euro. But enough about the institutional dimension – let us now focus on the content of our future European policies.

For a long time, the Benelux countries also played a driving role in building Europe. Alas, in the last few years, the Netherlands has turned in upon itself. European co-operation is no longer seen as being in the national interest. After the referendum, people tended to start looking to the United Kingdom. That, I think, is a mistake. Properly seen, Dutch interests would be served by playing an active part in revitalising the European process. For that, we need to step up co-operation between the Benelux countries and work closely with Germany and France, without neglecting the others. Our government has expressed a wish to see the Netherlands back in its natural place, in the vanguard of Europe. I rejoice at that.

As for Franco-Dutch co-operation, it works well, since we are both eminently sensible peoples. In France, because you have inherited a love of the applied sciences from the Greeks and Romans. In the Netherlands, because we have had to use all our ingenuity to keep nature in check. You are the country of Descartes. We are his adopted country. The engineers of both our countries fill me with admiration. I am thinking of your Thalys or your Millau Viaduct, and of the help we give countries threatened by the rising level of the oceans. Finally, the results achieved by Air France-KLM are a fine example of successful co-operation!

Finally, Mr Ambassador, this honour touches me because France, for me, is not just a country like the others – and there are very personal reasons for that.

Ever since I was young, and like many Dutchmen, I have loved France. What you call the “real” France – its art de vivre, its joie de vivre. Savoie in particular. Holidays in Thonon, later on the Côte d’Arboz. The Alpine roads by bike. Nature in the wild. Converting an old barn, with my sons, every summer for ten years! The people in our village, some of whom have come to see us in the Netherlands! My many French friends – particularly Bernard Bosson, an old colleague of mine on the European scene. The Savoyards, like the Limburgers, live on a crossroads between three countries. They are born European. They love their traditions, they love their families. That is why I feel at home with them.

And this summer, I have become a first-time grandfather, with the birth of my grandson Diederick. You wouldn’t know it from the name, but he is actually half-French, as my daughter chose to marry a Frenchman !!! As you can see, my family is doing something really practical to deepen Franco-Dutch relations!

And that, every day, is a source of great joy and happiness.

And is worth any number of speeches. Allow me now to say a few words in Dutch […]

In conclusion, I should like to thank President Sarkozy. I am greatly honoured by this outstanding award. I should also like to thank Ambassador Gaussot for his generous hospitality.

Finally, to my wife, my family and all my friends here – all my affection.
Appendix 4
Press releases

The following is a list of the press releases which can be consulted at: http://assembly.coe.int

Press releases 2005

1. René van der Linden from the Netherlands is new PACE President
2. ‘With the death of the Georgian Prime Minister, PACE has lost a very close friend’
3. Entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol: PACE President hails ‘a crucial first step’
4. PACE President welcomes result of elections in northern part of Cyprus
5. PACE President to visit Moscow
6. On the eve of his visit to Moscow, PACE President hopes that Aslan Maskhadov’s death will not trigger more violence
7. PACE President expresses concern over health of imprisoned Belarus opposition leader and calls for his transfer to hospital
8. PACE President welcomes voluntary transfers to the Hague Tribunal as a step towards justice
9. PACE President on Darfur vote: “allow the ICC to save lives”
10. A French ‘yes’ vote is also a vote for human rights, says René van der Linden
11. PACE President attends parliamentary rally for Florence Aubenas and Hussein Hanoun al Saadi
12. PACE President pays tribute to His Holiness Pope John Paul II
13. “The creation of an Asian Parliamentary Assembly will be a catalyst for political integration in Asia”, says PACE President
14. PACE President saddened by the death of Prince Rainier of Monaco
15. Assistance to patients at end of life and detentions in Guantánamo Bay to be debated at PACE Spring session
16. PACE President congratulates Pope Benedict XVI on his election
17. Council of Europe parliamentarians denounce kidnapping of journalists
18. PACE President on World Press Freedom Day: “Security-motivated censorship serves the cause of terrorists”
19. Council of Europe Third Summit: intercultural and inter-religious dialogue must be strengthened, says PACE President
20. PACE President welcomes preparation of a political report on the relations between the EU and the Council of Europe by Prime Minister Juncker
21. PACE President condemns executions by the Palestinian Authority
22. PACE President warns that “Europe could soon be on the road back to egocentric nationalism”
23. Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President René van der Linden condemns London terror
24. PACE President reacts to IRA announcement
25. PACE President to visit Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to discuss political reforms
26. PACE President pays tribute to Frère Roger
27. PACE President urges dialogue between government, opposition and civil society in Armenia
28. Georgia: PACE President urges authorities to maintain the momentum of reform
29. PACE President welcomes completion of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza
30. November elections will be a test case for Azerbaijan, says PACE President
31. Reform process in South Caucasus needs to be boosted, says PACE President
32. Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President to discuss human rights issues with US authorities and address the Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliament
33. PACE President warns against undermining the judicial independence of the European Court of Human Rights
34. Iran should not bypass “generous” European offer on nuclear programme, says PACE President
35. World Day Against the Death Penalty: “The fight is far from being over”, says Assembly President
36. Official visit by PACE President to Albania
37. PACE President calls on Albanian Parliament to strengthen the fight against corruption
38. PACE President calls for dialogue as France faces urban violence
39. PACE President to address Turkish Parliament on reform process
40. "The European aspiration of the Turkish people must not be deceived" says President of PACE, addressing the Turkish Parliament
41. PACE President warns of considerable danger of linking urban violence in France to religion
42. Alleged secret CIA detention centres – René van der Linden calls for full co-operation with PACE enquiry
43. PACE President to discuss priorities of Committee of Ministers’ Romanian chairmanship
44. Assembly President calls on Armenians to vote in Constitutional referendum
45. PACE President calls on Romania to take tougher action on corruption and human trafficking
46. PACE President calls on Azerbaijan authorities to abstain from using force against demonstrators
47. PACE President expresses satisfaction at arrest of Croatian war crimes suspect
48. PACE President welcomes President Bush’s acceptance of the McCain amendment

Press releases 2006

49. PACE President strongly condemns Iranian President for holocaust denial
50. Medical staff in Libya: PACE President welcomes court decision
51. Alleged CIA detentions: PACE President welcomes European Parliament investigation
52. PACE President on controversy over caricatures: "Rights come with responsibilities – but violence is never ever justified"
53. PACE President joins calls for closure of Guantánamo
54. Conference on Belarus looks ahead to election
55. End the isolation of the Belarusian people, says PACE President, calling for a reinforced Council of Europe presence in Minsk
56. International Women’s Day: red card to forced prostitution
57. Death of Slovodan Milosevic: “It is more urgent than ever that other war crimes suspects be brought to justice”
58. PACE President bitterly disappointed at the failure of the Belarusian presidential elections to meet international standards
59. René van der Linden: “ETA’s ceasefire announcement opens up a horizon of hope for all Europeans”
83. PACE President to raise EU accession preparations and anti-corruption measures during visit to Romania
84. Situation in Transnistria: PACE President calls for “rapprochemen and dialogue”
85. PACE President calls for immediate halt to fighting in Lebanon
86. PACE President calls on President Kaczynski to retract his proposal concerning reintroduction of the death penalty
87. PACE President calls for the immediate release of the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council
88. PACE President calls on the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights to examine efforts in Poland to reintroduce the death penalty
89. PACE President discusses local, national and regional issues during visit to Odessa in Ukraine
90. René van der Linden: Europeans need to form a united front in the battle against terrorism
91. René van der Linden: New record level arrivals of sub-Saharan migrants on the Canary Isles require European responses and European solutions
92. PACE President responds to xenophobic and intolerant incidents in Slovakia
93. PACE President condemns bomb attack in Turkish region of Van
94. PACE President calls for churches and other confessional organisations to receive official status with the Council of Europe
95. PACE President reacts to George Bush’s admission of secret CIA prisons
96. “Europe and the world cannot afford a clash of civilisations,” says PACE President
97. Five years after 9/11: winning hearts and minds will make us safer
98. PACE President visits Kazakhstan to promote democracy and inter-religious dialogue
99. René van der Linden condemns bomb attack in Diyarbakir
100. PACE President calls for “alliance between the secular and the sacred” to build better societies
101. Concluding visit, PACE President looks forward to developing co-operation with Kazakhstan
102. PACE President welcomes decision on EU accession for Bulgaria and Romania, but recalls their Council of Europe commitments
103. PACE President calls on Russia and Georgia to enter a process of de-escalation
104. PACE President: killing of Anna Politkovskaya is an attack on democracy
105. “Capital punishment must be totally removed in all countries which strive to uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights,” says PACE President
106. PACE President welcomes “Football against racism in Europe” action week
107. Democracy needs freedom, says PACE President at the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Moscow
108. PACE President reacts to verdict in trial of Saddam Hussein
109. PACE President reacts to Israeli shelling of Gaza town
110. PACE President, in Bratislava, calls for zero tolerance of intolerance and xenophobia

Press releases 2007

111. PACE President reacts to death penalty for medics in Libya
112. Executions in Japan: PACE President says capital punishment incompatible with Council of Europe values
113. PACE President deplores execution of Saddam Hussein
114. Council of Europe leaders call on Iraqi authorities not to proceed with executions
115. PACE President on working visit to Moscow
116. PACE President meets United Kingdom’s Europe Minister in London
117. PACE President will visit Belarus to encourage democratic developments
118. René van der Linden unanimously re-elected PACE President, election of PACE Vice-Presidents
119. PACE President concludes visit to Belarus with call for greater dialogue, fresh co-operation and positive steps to end its isolation
120. “No child is born a racist and no child should become one”
121. Council of Europe participates in 3rd World Congress against the death penalty
122. PACE President René van der Linden visits Cyprus to promote dialogue
123. Turn buffer zone in Cyprus from a symbol of division into a symbol of co-operation, says PACE President
124. René van der Linden hosts “historic” first meeting between Cyprus religious leaders
125. PACE President calls for the long-term goal of “a visa-free European continent”
126. Domestic violence “one of the most widespread violations of human dignity”, says PACE President and Human Rights Commissioner
127. By demolishing Nicosia’s “Berlin Wall” President Papadopoulos is helping to rebuild trust and confidence, says PACE President
128. Statement by the Council of Europe on the anniversary of the 2004 Madrid bombings
129. PACE President deeply moved by hundreds of appeals concerning the fate of the Bulgarian medics and Palestinian doctor
130. PACE will closely monitor the situation in Belarus in the run-up to Freedom Day
131. Tolerance in practice: PACE President calls for fair and balanced coverage of migrant issues in the media
132. PACE President warns against using the EU for domestic electoral purposes
133. PACE President recalls Armenian Prime Minister’s “talent for compromise”
134. PACE President receives “Premio Mediterraneo” award for promoting Euro-Med dialogue
135. PACE President in Vatican: highlights unique role of the Council of Europe in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue
136. Ukraine: PACE President van der Linden calls for respect for constitutional order
137. PACE gives green light to Montenegro’s request for accession
138. Unity of Ukraine is crucial for unity of Europe, says PACE President
139. PACE President regrets decision to remove Bronze Soldier memorial in Tallinn
140. PACE President welcomes resumption of power-sharing in Northern Ireland
141. PACE President expresses deep concern over the election of Serbia’s Parliamentary Speaker
142. PACE President welcomes agreement on a new government in Serbia
143. PACE President meets Ukraine leaders to seek consensus
144. PACE President calls on all political forces in Ukraine to urgently agree a clear solution to political crisis
145. PACE President expresses the hope that the verdict in the murder of Zoran Djindjic helps heal wounds
146. PACE President: election of Serbian Speaker – an important signal for the international community
147. PACE President strongly condemns bomb attack in Ankara
148. President of the Assembly welcomes Ukraine election date agreement
149. PACE President discusses Russia’s relations with Europe during visit to St Petersburg and Moscow
150. PACE President: Europe cannot be a success without Russia
151. “Neither Europe nor the wider world can afford to enter into a clash of civilisations,” PACE President says
152. PACE President: “Europe squabbles while people drown”
153. Guantánamo legal chaos proves that respect for the rule of law is essential to the fight against terrorism, says PACE President
154. PACE President to visit Portugal ahead of its EU Presidency
155. Mr Marty’s report has called governments to account at the European level, says PACE President
156. René van der Linden: EU’s approach to European non-member states risks “new dividing lines”
157. René van der Linden: “Turkey was promised EU membership, it is a promise we must keep”
158. PACE President calls on Palestinian leaders to end sectarian fighting
159. European Jewish Congress and PACE to co-operate in the field of nuclear catastrophe prevention and combating anti-Semitism
160. PACE President welcomes arrest of Kosovo war crimes suspect
161. World Refugee Day: PACE President calls for “durable solutions for the most vulnerable of the vulnerable” in the Balkans
162. PACE President: Church values should be reflected in politics
163. PACE President again calls for Russia’s assent to vital reform of the European Court of Human Rights
164. Frozen conflicts must be solved, says PACE President on eve of visit to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia
165. We cannot accept closed borders between Council of Europe member states, PACE President declares in Yerevan
166. Free and fair elections are the basic condition of democratic development, says PACE President in Baku
167. The use of force must be categorically excluded from the solution of frozen conflicts, says PACE President following his visit to Georgia
168. Bulgarian nurses and doctor: victims of a travesty of justice in Libya
169. PACE President shocked after the assassination of Turkish poll candidate
170. René van der Linden on official visit to Paris
171. Bulgarian nurses and doctor: PACE President “relieved”
172. Bulgarian nurses and doctor: the light at the end of the tunnel
173. PACE President meets Speaker of the Duma and Patriarch Alexy II in Moscow
174. PACE President visits Middle East to encourage current opportunities for peace
175. Jordanian King welcomes PACE’s parliamentary diplomacy in Middle East
176. PACE President proposes tripartite Knesset-Palestinian Legislative Council-PACE Forum
177. PACE President strongly condemns the execution of three death row inmates in Japan
178. Execution of Johnny Ray Conner in Texas a “macabre milestone”, says PACE President
179. René van der Linden invites President of the Palestinian Authority to address PACE
180. Murder of Anna Politkovskaya: PACE President welcomes today’s arrests
181. PACE President confident that Abdullah Gül’s presidency will lead to further integration of Turkey in Europe
182. Europe’s missing persons: Europe’s often marginalised or forgotten issue
183. ECHR financing should be of joint EP/PACE concern
184. PACE President to visit the Netherlands
185. PACE President to address the 3rd European Ecumenical Assembly
186. PACE President, ending official visit to the Netherlands, made Commander in the Order of Orange-Nassau
187. PACE President, at European Ecumenical Assembly, calls for international treaty to protect religious heritage
188. PACE President qualifies Polish opposition to a European Day against the Death Penalty as unacceptable
189. PACE President makes official visit to Baltic countries
190. PACE President urges Estonians: “don’t forget the past, but look to the future”
191. PACE President welcomes progress in normalisation of relations between Latvia and Russia
192. PACE President encourages Lithuania in its efforts to ensure equal rights for all
193. PACE President appeals for immediate end to violence in Burma/Myanmar
194. René van der Linden urges Ukrainian leaders to move forward with reform
195. “I am convinced that member states undervalue the potential of the Council of Europe”, says PACE President
196. PACE President condemns outright the terrorist attack in Sirnak province, Turkey
197. PACE President responds to Estonian Speaker: “please read my views”
198. Daniel Hoeffel – a great friend and supporter of the Council of Europe, says President
199. Murder of Anna Politkovskaya: time to know the truth, says PACE President
200. René van der Linden urges Marko Mihkelson to “stop this slandering”
201. Stable partnership with Russia “essential to peace and prosperity in Europe”
202. PACE President visits Slovenia ahead of its EU Presidency
203. “Rejection of anti-semitism is a universal principle”, says PACE President
204. PACE President welcomes imminent entry into force of Convention on action against trafficking in human beings
205. René van der Linden: “Our Assembly is an inclusive forum”
206. PACE President reminds students of the Greater Europe
207. PACE President appeals against death penalty for human rights activist in Iran
208. Monitoring human rights in the EU “is the job of the Council of Europe”
209. PACE President reacts to bus bombing in Togliatti, Russia
210. PACE President stresses there must be “no witch-hunt of Romanians in Italy”
211. PACE President welcomes Georgian decision to lift state of emergency
212. PACE President announces a European Day for Integration and Intercultural Tolerance in 2008
213. René van der Linden made Commandeur de la Légion d’Honneur – exceptional French decoration for the PACE President
214. PACE President pays tribute to Jean-Claude Juncker, ‘a great European and a genuine friend of the Council of Europe’
215. PACE President René van der Linden reacts to arrests in Moscow and St Petersburg
216. Signing of a cooperation agreement between PACE and EP
217. PACE President calls to commute the death sentences of three sentenced in Belarus
218. Signing of a cooperation agreement between PACE and EP - announcement
PACE members as of 30 June 2007

Socialist Group (SOC)  
179 Members  
Chairperson: Mr Lluís Maria de PUIG, Spain

Group of the European People’s Party (EPP/CD)  
178 Members  
Chairperson: Mr Luc Van den BRANDE, Belgium

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)  
95 Members  
Chairperson: Mr Mátyás EÖRSI, Hungary

Group of the Unified European Left (UEL)  
35 Members  
Chairperson: Mr Tiny KOX, The Netherlands

European Democrat Group (EDG)  
92 Members  
Chairperson: Mr Mikhail MARGELOV, Russian Federation

Representatives not belonging to a Political Group of the Assembly (NR)  
29 Members

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Special Adviser to the President  
(2005-2006)

Mrs Liri KOPACI-DI MICHELE  
Deputy Head of the Private Office  
(2005-2006)

Mr David MILNER  
Deputy to the Head of the Private Office  
(2005-2007)
“The Council of Europe was set up in 1949 by courageous visionaries intent on building a Europe based on justice and equity, a Europe that would bring freedom and peace to all its inhabitants. PACE continues to set great store by the vision of those who founded the Council of Europe; it strives to promote human rights and human dignity and champions openness and democracy. Just as it did 50 years ago, it allows Europeans to voice their opinions and involves them in the building of Europe.”

René van der Linden

Born in Eys-Wittem, Netherlands, in 1943, René van der Linden studied economics. He worked in the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture before becoming Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with responsibility for European Affairs. He was a member of the Second Chamber of the States-General between 1977 and 1998 and a member of the First Chamber from 1999. He was also a delegate to the Convention on the Future of the EU. He has been a PACE member since 1989 and was Chairperson of the European People's Party group between 1999 and 2005. He was elected PACE President in January 2005. He has been awarded several high-ranking distinctions, including:

– Commandeur dans l’Ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur (2007)
– Commander in the Order of Orange-Nassau (2007)
– Knight in the Order of the Lion of the Netherlands (1988)
– Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (1986)

PACE meets four times a year for a week-long plenary session in the Palais de l’Europe in Strasbourg. The 318 representatives and 318 substitutes are appointed by national parliaments of the 47 member states. Each country has between two and eighteen representatives, who provide a balanced reflection of the political forces represented in the national parliament. The Assembly’s work is prepared by ten committees and a Bureau comprising the President of the Assembly, the twenty Vice-Presidents, the chairs of committees and the chairs of the five political groups.

http://assembly.coe.int