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**ADDRESS BY MR MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU,
PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,
AT THE MAASTRICHT SCHOOL
OF MANAGEMENT
(Maastricht, Monday 25 October 2010)**

**The role of the Parliamentary Assembly
of the Council of Europe**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure for me to take the floor as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe at this prestigious business school before a distinguished audience of students and professors. I find it very enriching and stimulating to meet younger generations, in particular students

and I expect an interesting session of questions and answers at the end of my contribution.

In fact, I find it quite natural to speak about values and principles to future businessmen and managers. The fundamental values that we support and promote - democracy, human rights and the rule of law - are not the aim in itself, but a means to ensure long-lasting peace and prosperity on our Continent and all over the world. These are not just abstract principles – their respect creates a general framework for all human activity, including, naturally, business.

I was told that students from 40 nationalities coming from Latin America, North America, Asia, Africa, Western and Eastern Europe and Middle East are represented in this room.

I find it extremely telling - this is how the world looks like

today – increasingly inter-connected, increasingly globalised. But the globalisation can only work in the long run if our societies respect the same fundamental values. Otherwise globalisation will only expose our differences and create frictions and misunderstandings.

The Council of Europe was founded in the wake of the Second World War, by political leaders who shared the firm will to prevent similar tragic conflicts from happening again. The headquarters of the Organisation were placed in Strasbourg, historically one of the most disputed European borders, to underline that reconciliation is the "raison d'être" of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe is a permanent forum for dialogue, the only truly pan-European one. Forty-seven member states - all

European countries with the exception of Belarus – are now under the same roof and the same flag within the Council of Europe.

Time has shown that besides “hard security”, based on national defense and collective defense organisations, “soft security” has an important role to play in building long lasting peace. And soft security is largely based on sharing common standards of human rights, the rule of law and democracy, which we promote in the Council of Europe.

After 1989 and the fall of the Berlin wall, our Organisation played a major role in European affairs, supporting the countries in Central and Eastern Europe in building their democratic institutions.

The Council of Europe is a standard-setting body which contributed substantially to creating a corpus of common values and principles now shared by virtually all European countries. The foundations of this common value legal system were laid 60 years ago, with the signing of the European Convention on Human Rights. Since then, the Council has developed a wealth of legal instruments, standards, monitoring mechanisms, good practices and means of international cooperation. Up to now, more than 200 European treaties in all areas of the Council of Europe's competence have been concluded, thus creating a unique pan-European legal area.

Besides conventions, we use other “soft” instruments to encourage legal harmonisation around our principles. One of the most important Council of Europe institutions is the

European Commission for Democracy through Law, also known as the Venice Commission, a partial agreement which is part of the institutional framework of the Council of Europe. The Venice Commission has provided legal advice and assistance to countries, notably in Central and Eastern Europe but also outside the European continent (for example, Kirghizstan, South-Africa), to help them rebuild and reshape their democratic institutions and legislation in many fields, from judicial reforms to election laws.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe covers a broad spectrum of political ideologies and hosts an immense variety and diversity of languages, cultures, traditions and religions represented on the European continent.

The Assembly contributes to the goals of the Council of Europe with its specific instruments and mechanisms. One of the most efficient is the so-called monitoring procedure. The Monitoring Committee of the Assembly is responsible for verifying the fulfillment of the obligations and commitments assumed by the member states upon their accession to our organisation. Currently, the Assembly is assisting ten countries under the monitoring procedure (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Russian Federation, Serbia and Ukraine) and four countries engaged in the post-monitoring dialogue (Bulgaria, Monaco, the “former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Turkey) in the process of consolidating their democratic institutions with a view to ensuring full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

As a permanent forum for dialogue, the Parliamentary Assembly has also been very active in developing parliamentary diplomacy. This does not replace “traditional” diplomacy and parliamentarians do not aim at “stealing the job” of career diplomats, but they can give a remarkable contribution, particularly in the field of conflict prevention and conflict peaceful solution.

When elected President of the Parliamentary Assembly last January, I sought to focus Assembly’s action and my first official visits on those member states presenting delicate political and institutional situations. I would like to share with you a few impressions of these visits, which will give you a panoply of the complexity of issues and challenges that we have to face in Europe.

- in Albania, we have been working hard to encourage the opposition to return to Parliament. Our work is far from over and we have to intensify our efforts further, in the wake of the approaching local elections.

- in Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite all our efforts, as well as in violation of a judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, the authorities failed to amend the State Constitution before the elections on 3 October. Much more energy will be needed after the elections in order to implement Assembly recommendations and set up a serious institutionalised process aimed at elaborating a comprehensive package of constitutional amendments.

- regarding the situation in Kosovo, our focus has been to make sure that irrespective of its status, Kosovo should be a safe place for all those who live in it and a place where democratic standards are of an equivalent level to that upheld by the Council of Europe. While taking into account the legitimate interests and concerns of Serbia and the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, the Assembly has resolved “to initiate a dialogue with representatives of the political forces elected to the Kosovo Assembly on issues of common interest”. Therefore, Kosovo representatives will be invited to meetings of the Committees of the Assembly whenever issues which concern Kosovo are discussed.

- During my visit to Russia in July, I felt that the current climate with the Council of Europe is positive. There remain questions on which our opinions differ, and there are demands which

Russia, as member of our organisation, has to fulfill. But if we work as partners, with mutual respect and without double standards, I am sure that progress can be achieved even on these difficult issues. We now have excellent co-operation, even on a very sensitive file, such as the situation in the North Caucasus. The recent Assembly Resolution on this issue was fully supported by the members of the Russian delegation.

- This brings us to a difficult subject, the war between Georgia and Russia. Our Assembly fully supports the territorial integrity of Georgia. The political negotiations between the parties concerned being held in Geneva, I am of the opinion that the Council of Europe must concentrate on the humanitarian issues to improve the life of ordinary citizens in the region. The Monitoring Committee will soon be organising a hearing with the participation of all stakeholders concerned in order to

determine what could be the contribution of the Assembly on this matter.

- I recently paid an official visit to Ukraine. The country now has a unique chance to carry out urgently needed reforms after years of political instability. But, to succeed in this task, the new President and governing coalition need to associate different political forces in the country with the reform process and to resist the temptation of excessive concentration of power. In this respect, local elections to be held on 31 October 2010 will be an important test for Ukraine's democracy.

- The Council of Europe has done every effort to help resolve the present political and constitutional deadlock in Moldova. It is unfortunate that the referendum on the revision of Article 78 of the Constitution failed and that the country is facing yet

another parliamentary election. The Assembly will of course observe the forthcoming elections. We shall pursue our mediating efforts between the different political forces after the elections, in order to help them find a solution to the current deadlock.

- In the South-Caucasus region, we have also been encouraging positive moves aiming at bringing solution to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Here again, we do not interfere with the OSCE Minsk Group where the negotiations regarding the settlement of the conflict are going on. We try to encourage trust and confidence-building measures, in particular, among the parliamentary delegations of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

- Both in Armenia and Azerbaijan we still need to do a lot of work to improve public confidence and consolidate the democratic process. In Armenia, further efforts are needed to remedy the systemic problems which prevent the country's democratic institutions to function correctly and restore citizens' confidence in the democratic process. In this context, the Monitoring Committee recently held a hearing with the participation of all parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political parties, in order to take stock of the progress made in the implementation of Assembly recommendations. In Azerbaijan, the Assembly will observe the forthcoming parliamentary elections in November 2010. After the elections, we will continue to support the Azerbaijani authorities in consolidating democratic institutions.

- Belarus is the only European country whose parliament has no official status with the Assembly. There is one non-negotiable condition for us to start discussion on de-freezing our relation – the death penalty. Following two more executions last spring, the Assembly decided to put on hold its activities involving high-level contacts with Belarus, but we are trying not to cut all contacts, also, in the light of how the forthcoming presidential elections will be held.

- A word regarding my own country, Turkey. The positive result of the referendum on constitutional change, as well as the high turnout, showed how strongly the Turkish people are attached to their democratic rights and freedoms, and to a future in Europe. This is a powerful signal on the eve of Turkey's chairmanship of the Council of Europe. Hopefully further reforms will follow soon, including a new Constitution.

Finally, we have also pursued our strategy of bringing non-member states closer to the Council of Europe and to our standards, particularly through the adoption of a new special status, called “Partnership for Democracy”, for the Parliaments of neighbouring non-member states. We received official requests for this status from the Parliaments of Morocco and Palestine and the Parliament of Kazakhstan is currently considering to make a request.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have just made a short overview of our country-specific action. But the tasks of the Parliamentary Assembly are not limited to supporting member states facing specific challenges. We must also urgently react to the challenges all

our democracies have to face as well as respond to the most burning issues of European politics.

During the last couple of months, the issue of the Roma population in Europe has raised serious questions about discrimination. This is why, just several weeks ago, our Assembly held an urgent debate on the recent rise of national security discourse in Europe: the case of Roma. In this debate, the Assembly strongly condemned as racist and xenophobic, and therefore unacceptable in a democracy, the use of language stigmatising Roma or any other minority or migrant group. While the Assembly attaches the utmost importance to freedom of expression, especially in political debates on immigration, it unequivocally rejects all forms of racial or ethnic discrimination as unacceptable.

But the issue of discrimination against Roma is just the tip of the iceberg. The recent general rise of extremist, racist and xenophobic rhetoric in many of our member states has deep roots and requires a comprehensive response. Recently, we have seen political support growing to parties inspired by racist ideas in a number of national elections in our member states as well as in the elections to the European Parliament. It is a fact that, while mainstream parties have long failed to anticipate or face the challenges of public order and personal security, extremist populist parties have sought to capitalise on society's security concerns by simply equating immigration with crime and insecurity. In this context, in an attempt to regain the support of the electorate, mainstream political parties are picking up some of the radical, xenophobic and discriminatory language of extremist parties. This is an extremely worrying trend. We should not hide behind populist rhetoric. We are

living in a changing world and it is our primary responsibility, as politicians, to face new political challenges, discuss openly issues which voters are concerned with and propose appropriate responses to real problems.

In this context, I would like to mention another Council of Europe endeavour in which the Assembly takes an active part: this is Forum for the Future of Democracy. The Forum was established in 2005 with the aim of strengthening democracy, political freedoms and citizens' participation through the exchange of ideas, information and examples of best practices. It brings together some 400 participants from the 47 Council of Europe member and observer States representing public authorities, civil society and academia. This year's Forum took place in Yerevan last week and examined the principles and challenges our democracies have to face now, as well as their

implications for the future. The Assembly's reports on the State of Democracy in Europe were instrumental in organising the debates of the participants in the Forum. I am sure the recommendations of the Forum will help all of us gain a better understanding of the challenges our societies have to face as well as find appropriate approaches to address them.

Dear friends,

Here, I must say a few words about one of the most topical sectors of activity of the Assembly as well as one of the key political priorities of my mandate. This is inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. The foundation of our common European home must be built on an open society based on respect for diversity not on exclusion, not on discrimination, not on fear and not on hatred. We must eradicate racism,

xenophobia, anti-semitism, Islamophobia and all kinds of similar phobia leading to discrimination and intolerance. Inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue is, in my opinion, the most effective tool for mutual understanding and to fight against discrimination. In April 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly will be holding a debate on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. Within the framework of the preparation of this debate, I met a number of religious leaders of key confessions in Europe: the Pope, the Chief Mufti of the Russian Federation, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Grand Rabbi of Russia and the CIS Region, the Patriarch of Romania. I look forward to this debate and expect it to produce concrete action-oriented recommendations aiming at improving inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in Europe.

Dear friends,

The Council of Europe's action and its practical and political impact must be enhanced by the necessary reform of the Organization as a whole. Today the need for reform is stronger than ever. We are not changing our main objectives, but aiming at becoming more pro-active, and enhancing the political relevance, impact and effectiveness of the Organisation. The Council of Europe will have to "focus on what it can do best, in the areas where we can make a real impact", as our Secretary General Thorbjorn Jagland said when addressing the Parliamentary Assembly. Within the Parliamentary Assembly we have started to discuss how to reform our own working methods, procedures and structures to increase the relevance of our work.

The Strasbourg Court itself is undergoing a reform process to ensure its viability and effectiveness in the future. We call it Interlaken process, after the Swiss town where a Conference organised by the Swiss Chairmanship of our Committee of Ministers on this matter took place early this year. A follow-up conference will be held in April next year in Izmir, in my home country, under the Turkish Chairmanship.

The Council of Europe works in close cooperation with other international organisations. Links with the European Union are, in particular, very close, with a wide range of joint programmes and other joint activities such as election observation missions.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law being the prerequisites for the accession to the European Union, the

Council of Europe's support and assistance helped many countries on their way to the EU. The same now applies to the countries, particularly in South Eastern Europe, which are currently candidates for membership in the EU. We encourage the European Union to make full use of the reports of our Assembly on the situation in these countries when preparing its opinion on the membership applications.

The relations with the European Union will become even closer when the EU will join the European Convention on Human Rights as provided for under article 6 of the Lisbon Treaty, coupled with Article 59 of the European Convention on Human Rights (as amended by Protocol No.14). After accession, the whole Pan-European system for the protection of fundamental rights will be enhanced by the incorporation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights into its primary law.

Moreover, as the Union's powers have and are likely to continue to extend to fields which traditionally belong to the 27 member states of the EU, hence the need for individuals to have access to the Strasbourg Court.

Accession of the EU to the European Convention of Human Rights is our top priority. At the same time, in the process of creating a common European legal space, it would be important that the EU accedes to other relevant key CoE conventions, in particular, those on the Prevention of Terrorism; on the Prevention of Torture; on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings; on the Protection of Children against Sexual Abuse, as well as to the revised Social Charter. I hope this will happen once the negotiations on the accession to the European Convention of Human Rights are completed.

Dear Friends,

Thank you once again for your invitation and the interest that you attach to the Council of Europe. We need your support and ideas to serve even better the European citizens.

Thank you for your attention.