

AS/Per (2007) PV 2
22 June 2007

Standing Committee

Minutes¹

**of the meeting held
in Belgrade
on 24 May 2007**

¹ Approved by the Assembly on 25 June 2007.

1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

Mr van der Linden, President of the Assembly, opened the meeting at 9 am and thanked the Serbian delegation to the Assembly and its Chairman, Mr Aligrudic, as well as the Serbian parliamentary authorities for their invitation to hold the present meeting of the Standing Committee in Belgrade, and for the great hospitality extended.

Serbia had also shown its hospitality by offering a democratically elected parliament in a modern, dynamic country that had just formed a democracy-minded and Europe-orientated government. It was to be hoped that dialogue, compromise and consensus would become the hallmark for the new ruling coalition. It was encouraging that the Government had reached unity on a number of principles aimed at improving the lives of the Serbian people. Serbia was part of Europe. The Serbian people had the right and should be given the opportunity to be truly European. The Serbian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers would give the country the opportunity to make a change in Europe rather than, as often in the past, be told by Europe what to do. Serbia had now reached a crucial stage where it wanted to move forward and look to the future. Full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) was the best way for the Serbian people to show that a new era had begun. It was totally unacceptable that war criminals like Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić were still at large.

The most important areas in which the Assembly expected Serbia to undertake reform included institutions and administrative structures; the judiciary and decentralisation; the protection of national minorities and ethnic groups; the media; NGOs; religious communities; the police; the army; the security services; the fight against corruption and organised crime; trafficking in human beings; and the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons.

As regards Kosovo, the Assembly's Resolution 1533 on the current situation in Kosovo, called for a "negotiated and mutually accepted solution to Kosovo's status". This was the best guarantee that the outcome would not be disputed in future. The Assembly stood ready to assist Serbia on the path of democratic reform in any way it could. It would also be helpful if the Serbian parliament followed up on the Assembly's report on the state of democracy and human rights in Europe held at its April 2007 part-session. This included holding a debate in the parliament on the report in the near future. The feedback from such a debate would be most useful to the Assembly in its own work on the subject.

2. WELCOME ADDRESS BY MR OLIVER DULIĆ, SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

Mr Dulić thanked the President for his statement and welcomed the Standing Committee most warmly to Serbia. His country was honoured to assume the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the next six months. It was also a heavy responsibility. Only four years had passed since the then Serbia and Montenegro had gained membership to the Council of Europe, a span of time in which Serbia had changed considerably for the better. Serbia was a young democracy which valued its multi-ethnic and multi-religious character. The country fully subscribed to the Council of Europe's values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Serbia was determined to make rapid further progress, such as by creating a new legal framework. Serbia had chosen the slogan 'One Europe – our Europe' as the motto for its Council of Europe chairmanship. It remained fully committed to making significant progress in building a Europe without dividing lines.

The President thanked Mr Dulić for his statement. He welcomed Mr Jeremic, with whom he had a very interesting meeting on the eve.

3. EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH MR VUK JEREMIĆ, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

Mr Jeremić joined Mr Dulić in welcoming the Standing Committee members to Serbia. He made a statement (reproduced in [Appendix III to these minutes](#)).

The President thanked Mr Jeremić for his statement, and in particular for his words about Serbia's commitment to full and immediate cooperation with the ICTY. Such a commitment would also be necessary for closer links with the European Union.

Mr Van den Brande thanked the Minister for his clear position on Kosovo. Serbia's credibility would depend largely on its degree of cooperation with the ICTY.

Mr Jeremić recalled that Serbia had done much on this already. Thus, several people had been prosecuted and convicted of war crimes. This being said, even more could no doubt be achieved and it was the present Serbian government's priority to fulfil all its obligations. The country's National Security Council would soon take up its work, with its effectiveness also very much depending on good coordination between the security and intelligence apparatuses. Kosovo was a complicated matter. It was his belief that a compromise could be found, as had been the case in, say, Northern Ireland, after several decades of conflict. It was important that all sides work in tandem for a lasting solution, even if it took time. The present situation in Kosovo was not satisfactory. The Serbian proposal wanted to avoid the pitfalls of a 'maximalist' solution. Serbia had nothing against far-reaching autonomy for the province. However, it was impossible for Serbia to give the province up altogether. It was important to take time to negotiate and seek a solution.

Mr Gardetto wondered what the Serbian chairmanship planned to do to improve the budgetary situation of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, how would Serbia react if the Ahtisaari Plan went through?

Mr Jeremić replied that his country would promote the most responsible attitude possible vis-à-vis the Council of Europe budget for 2008. As regards Kosovo, Serbia was a member state of the United Nations and gave its continuing support to UN principles. It was well known that the country did not support the Ahtisaari Plan. Nor was it certain that the Security Council would agree to it. However, Serbia would not provoke a conflict over Kosovo, since it felt that peace and rational behaviour had to prevail over all other considerations. Serbia would never again engage in isolationism. New talks were necessary to resolve the Kosovo issue.

Mr Kox hoped that the highly constructive statement by the Minister would be followed by deeds, for instance through the delivery of the missing indictees to the Hague, especially Mr Mladić and Mr Karadžić. This was a crucial test of Serbian commitment to Europe and international law. Furthermore, would the Serbian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers work in favour of having the EU join the European Convention on Human Rights? Finally, what would the Serbian CM chairmanship do about ensuring higher attendance by Ministers of Foreign Affairs at future CM meetings?

Mr Jeremić stated that other indictees besides Mr Mladić and Mr Karadžić should also be brought to the ICTY. He was, however, not a security or intelligence expert and could therefore not express himself with the necessary confidence on this matter. After all, the United States had still not found Mr Bin Laden. The new government would, nevertheless, do its utmost to comply with ICTY undertakings. He very much hoped for concrete results by the end of the Serbian presidency. He would himself do his best to have fellow Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Council of Europe member states attend forthcoming meetings of the Committee of Ministers in person. As regards the Memorandum of Understanding, it was an often underestimated document. It had considerable potential, even as it represented a compromise between many different interests and did not fully meet PACE expectations.

The President said that the parliamentary dimension would have to be made stronger in the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding. The Parliamentary Assembly counted on the Serbian chairmanship to assist in this. The same held for the Juncker report.

Mr Jurgens commended the Minister on his statement which had been very clear on his government's intention to cooperate with the ICTY. Serbia lived under the mortgage of the past and had to acquit itself of it.

Mr Jeremić confirmed that the Serbian government would stay the course in this regard. He thanked the Assembly for its support.

Mr Foss wondered how the Minister saw the possibility of avoiding unrest in Kosovo if the Ahtisaari Plan was not accepted. He also questioned the Minister on his position with regard to Mr Tadić's recent intention to plan the reorganisation of the security and intelligence apparatus.

Mr Jeremić reiterated that Serbia was not going to take up arms over Kosovo under any circumstances. This being said, Serbia could not conceive of acknowledging an independent Kosovo. Serbia trusted in the wisdom of the United Nations Security Council in avoiding any mistakes. He confirmed the planned restructuring of the security apparatus in Serbia, in close cooperation between the President of the country and the Prime Minister.

Mrs Bilgehan referred to the Council of Europe Campaign “Stop domestic violence against women” - very much supported by the Assembly’s Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which she chaired. Members of the Committee had participated in a Round Table held in Belgrade the previous day on “The role of Parliament in promoting gender equality and combating domestic violence”. The Round Table had been organised by the Joint Initiative to Support Parliamentary Institutions in Serbia and Montenegro, which was an EU-funded project managed by the European Agency for Reconstruction and implemented by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. There was also the exhibition “Break the silence on domestic violence”, which would open the same day in the very premises where the present meeting was being held. Did Serbia have any further plans to support the campaign?

Mr Jeremić said that Serbia fully supported the campaign and would continue to work actively with it, as it indeed had in the two examples mentioned. A campaign at national level was underway as part of this process.

In reply to a question by **Mr Schmied**, **Mr Jeremić** expressed deep concern for the non-Albanian people in Kosovo, not least since the elections in the province had not been democratic and had not given minorities their due say.

The President thanked the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia for his particularly detailed comments and wished him every possible success in his new functions.

Following the exchange of views, **Mr Jurgens**, Vice-President of the Assembly, took over from the President **in the chair**.

4. EXAMINATION OF NEW CREDENTIALS

Doc. 11287

The Standing Committee **ratified** the credentials of the newly appointed members of the parliamentary delegations of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Romania and Sweden as they appeared in Doc. 11287.

5. MODIFICATIONS IN THE COMPOSITION OF COMMITTEES

Commissions (2007) 5

The Standing Committee **ratified** the changes in the composition of Assembly committees in respect of the delegations of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Romania and Sweden, as they appeared in the document Commissions (2007) 5.

6. REQUEST FOR A CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE OR A DEBATE UNDER URGENT PROCEDURE

The President noted that no request for a current affairs debate or a debate under urgent procedure had been submitted within the required deadline and, accordingly, there would be no debate under item 11.

7. AGENDA

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The revised draft agenda was **adopted**.

The President informed the Committee that an exhibition on the theme “Break the silence on domestic violence” would be inaugurated in the Sava Centre at lunchtime.

8. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY’S SITTINGS HELD ON 19 APRIL (MORNING AND AFTERNOON) AND 20 APRIL (MORNING) 2007

AS (2007) PV 16, 17 and 18

The minutes of the Parliamentary Assembly’s sittings on 19 April (morning and afternoon) and 20 April (morning) 2007 were **approved**.

9. REFERENCES, TRANSMISSIONS AND MODIFICATIONS OF REFERENCES TO COMMITTEE

AS/Bur (2007) 45 rev.

The **Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly** referred to document AS/Bur (2007) 45 rev., which set out the proposals for the references, transmissions and modifications of references to committees and which had been considered by the Bureau at its meeting on 23 May 2007. He notified members of changes suggested by the Bureau under this item.

The Standing Committee **approved** the references, transmissions and modifications of references as they appeared in Appendix 1 to Appendix II below.

10. OBSERVATION OF ELECTIONS

Observation of the parliamentary elections in Armenia (12 May 2007)

Press release

Rapporteur of the Ad hoc Committee of the Bureau:
Mr Leo Platvoet (Netherlands, UEL)

Mr Platvoet informed the Standing Committee that the Ad Hoc Committee observing the elections had not yet had time to finalise its report. This would be done in time for the June part-session of the Assembly. ODIHR had not yet published its final conclusions as well. Still, he was able to provide a few preliminary impressions. The elections could be considered a touchstone as regards the state of Armenian democracy. There had been some improvements over past elections but concerns remained about alleged vote-buying and insufficient transparency in the voting process. In some constituencies there had only been one candidate. In certain parts of the country the ruling party seemed to enjoy undue dominance. A number of divergences existed between preliminary and final tallies of results. There had been numerous unauthorised persons at polling stations. It was also difficult to ascertain what happened at the tabulation stage of the vote count.

Mr Vareikis said he had been stationed as an observer in a remote part of Armenia, where he had noted some shortcomings. In certain villages local observers seemed to give instructions to those who voted.

Mr Torosyan thanked Mr Platvoet and the Ad Hoc Committee for their work, and also commended the contribution by ODIHR and the Venice Commission. Armenia had done much over the past few years to improve the transparency of the voting process. There might still have been shortcomings and Armenia would work in the coming months and years with experts to further improve the situation. There had been TV coverage of the counting process in many polling stations. This had been of great value.

11. CURRENT AFFAIRS DEBATE OR DEBATE UNDER URGENT PROCEDURE

None.

12. ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND DEVELOPMENT

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| a. | Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2008 | Doc. 11278 |
| b. | Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2008 | Doc. 11279 |

Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights:
Mr Paul Wille (Belgium, ALDE)

Mr Wille presented the report on "The Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2008" (Doc. 11278), together with the report on "Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2008" (Doc. 11279). He said that the current policy of zero real growth of the Council of Europe budget was unacceptable - accompanied as it was by seemingly arbitrary across-the-board reductions and inspired by what looked like a micro-management view of the Council of Europe's mission. The Assembly refused to accept the "programmed euthanasia" apparently foreseen for the institution. The Council of Europe was no longer engaged in some fields. The prospects for 2008 were indeed serious. The present budgetary policy was all the more inexplicable since, at the same time, the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency in Vienna, whose mission was only vaguely defined, received major funding.

As the debate held by the Assembly at its April part-Session had shown, the defence of democracy and human rights required greater attention and more funding. The complexity of human rights necessitated strong involvement by the elected representatives of the people. It could not be dealt with exclusively by judges and diplomats. Extensive efficiency gains had already been carried out within the Council of Europe and further budgetary cuts would have a highly negative impact on the quality of work. The debate had to be brought to the political stage.

One third of Council of Europe member states in fact paid less to the organisation than the administrative costs resulting from their participation in the European Court of Human Rights alone. He drew particular attention to paragraph 19 in the draft Opinion contained in Document 11278, calling on the Committee of Ministers to adopt a multi-annual budgetary framework in order to have clear perception of short and medium-term requirements. Staff did not only represent a cost to the organisation but also, and above all, a value to it.

Furthermore, it would be reasonable to expect countries enjoying observer status with the Council of Europe to also pay a contribution to the ordinary budget. Politicians must firmly commit themselves to making the Council of Europe into a "European centre of excellence for democracy and human rights". This could certainly not be achieved with the current budgetary proposals as presented by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. They rather risked leading to the atrophy of the organisation.

As regards the expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the 2008 financial year (Doc. 11279), it was worth noting that there had been a real reduction in the Assembly's operational expenditure for 2007 amounting to over € 300,000. These last-minute reductions had concerned the operating budget and had been imposed on the Assembly without prior consultation or discussion. Given the many additional tasks continuously entrusted to the Assembly, it was vital that its 2008 budget at least be maintained at the same level as that of 2007. The Assembly was the Council of Europe's parliamentary body and political forum, and it made a significant contribution to its democratic legitimacy. Could it really be the intention of member states to have human rights, democracy and the rule of law handled exclusively by diplomats and civil servants, to the exclusion of the directly elected representatives of Europe?

Mr Vrettos, Chairman of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, stated his full agreement with what Mr Wille had just said. The Council of Europe, very much including its Assembly, were severely constrained by the zero increase in real terms observed in recent times, and even more by the cuts imposed. This was true especially in view of the continually increasing needs of the European Court of Human Rights. The Assembly and the Council of Europe needed at least to be able to maintain their current level of activities. The Assembly would perhaps have to launch a campaign in national parliaments to draw attention to the problem. The President of the Assembly and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe should establish contact with national governments on the subject. It was not satisfactory when the Secretary General of the Council of Europe first said he knew that the Assembly was right politically, and then went on to add that he still had to follow the instructions of the Committee of Ministers.

Mr Schreiner warmly congratulated Mr Wille on his reports. The members of the Assembly, whose credibility was now at stake, had to react forcefully. The recommendations contained in the Assembly's Opinions would have to be followed. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe should better heed the Assembly's recommendations, for he had, after all, been elected by it. After several years of continued efficiency savings, the organisation risked dying.

Mr De Puig said that Mr Wille's Opinions had served as an eye-opener. The present situation was unacceptable, as was any suggestion that it was irreversible. The relevance of the Council of Europe to the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe was poorly understood by member states. He agreed with Mr Vrettos that some kind of public campaign might have to be launched to draw the general public's attention to the situation.

Mr Van den Brande said that the debate about the Council of Europe's and the Assembly's budget was no longer a technical one, but that it had become eminently political. As such, it had to be carried to national capitals and foreign ministers. His own political group, the EPP, fully supported Mr Wille's conclusions. The institutions of the Council of Europe – very much including the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the European Court of Human Rights - were indispensable pillars in the European edifice. The 47 governments of member states would have to assume their responsibilities.

Mr Gardetto also commended Mr Wille. The reasoning of governments was hypocritical and the result was the slow killing of the organisation. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe would have to face their responsibilities. It had to be ensured that the core activities of the Council of Europe and its central

institutions such as the Assembly, the European Court of Human Rights and the Venice Commission could function satisfactorily. Furthermore, within the Assembly, perhaps staff could be moved from Assembly committees with less to do to those with more.

Mr Eörsi said that the political group he chaired, ALDE, fully supported Mr Wille's conclusions. At the same time it was important to search for ways to improve the Assembly's own work. More controversial and even politically uncomfortable subjects would have to be taken up to a greater extent. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe had initiated certain promising reforms, but he needed to explain them to the Assembly. This was the fourth time the Secretary General of the Council of Europe was not attending a meeting of the Standing Committee. This was not satisfactory.

Mr Ivanić pointed out the lack of information transmission of the Ministers Deputies to their ministers for Foreign Affairs. The President of the Assembly should give a presentation to the Committee of Ministers on the Assembly's budgetary needs and requirements. Was it really acceptable for the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to hold views so opposite to those of the Parliamentary Assembly? Furthermore, he noted that too many PACE members, in particular parliamentarians of EU member states, never participated in its activities and meetings.

Mr Wille welcomed the unanimous support of colleagues to his views. A debate on the matter during the Assembly part-session could no longer be avoided.

The President suggested there might be a case for an urgent or current affairs debate on the political dimension of the Council of Europe budget at the request, for instance, of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development.

Mr Vrettos, speaking in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, felt this was a good idea which he would be happy to raise at that Committee's next meeting.

The President put to the vote the draft opinions set out in Doc. 11278 and Doc. 11279, which were unanimously adopted [Opinion 264 (2007) and Opinion 265 (2007)].

13. SOCIAL, HEALTH AND FAMILY AFFAIRS

a. Monitoring of commitments as regards social rights

Doc. 11234

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs:
Mr Claude Evin (France, SOC)*

Mr Glaván presented the report on "Monitoring of commitments as regards social rights" (Doc. 11234) in the absence of Mr Evin, Rapporteur. The report was the first of its kind, as it examined in detail the modalities and functioning of the revised European Social Charter. The Charter served as a kind of compass for contracting Council of Europe member states, indicating the direction in which social policies would have to be further improved in order to protect the rights of Europeans. The European Social Charter should in fact be seen as a prolongation in the social field of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Similarly, the European Committee of Social Rights, the Charter's main organ, should be seen as the counterpart to the European Court of Human Rights in the social field. The report called for a corresponding modification in the methods of work of that Committee, so that it would be in a better position to handle its increasing workload. The report also called on the Committee of Ministers to permit the Assembly to elect the members of the European Committee of Social Rights, in the way it elected the members of the European Court of Human Rights. This was all the more natural as the Assembly was the most prominent expression of democratic values in the Council of Europe.

The report furthermore recommended that the activities of the European Commissioner for Human Rights should extend more into the social field. This was in line with the statement by the Commissioner on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Revised European Social Charter, when he had said that all human rights were intimately related and indeed indivisible.

Mr Shybko congratulated Mr Evin on his excellent report, which dealt with an instrument of the Council of Europe of the highest importance and aimed at strengthening the principles and values of the Council of Europe.

The President moved an oral amendment to paragraph 14 which was **agreed** to. He then put to the vote the draft recommendation set out in Doc. 11234, as amended. It was **adopted** unanimously [Recommendation 1795 (2007)].

b. The situation of elderly persons in Europe

Doc. 11179
Amendments

Rapporteur of the Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs:

Mr Jean-Marie Bockel (France, SOC)

Rapporteur of the Committee on Migrations, Refugees and:

Population (for opinion): Mrs Minodora Cliveti (Romania, SOC)

Doc. 11200

Mr Glavăn presented the report "The situation of elderly persons in Europe" (Doc. 11179) in the absence of Mr Bockel, rapporteur. The report represented the wish of the Committee on Social, Health and Family Affairs to take up subjects of the highest concern in the everyday life of Europe's citizens. Its central message was that the European population was rapidly ageing. At present, in the world, over 600 million people were aged 60 or over. This called for a new approach to social policies. The elderly were still all too often confronted with various forms of discrimination in daily life, notwithstanding the fact that a longer life expectancy should be considered an opportunity for all.

The report called on governments to take concrete action in the social protection field to assist the elderly. This concerned pensions, access to social services and greater opportunities for the elderly to lead an active life also in retirement. He hoped that members of the Standing Committee of all ages would be able to support this important report, not least since, with the inescapable passage of time, even those who were young today would some day themselves be old.

Mr Preda presented an opinion prepared by Mrs Cliveti, Rapporteur of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, who was unfortunately prevented from attending the present meeting. The opinion focused on the manifold forms of discrimination facing in particular ageing migrants. True, this group was very heterogeneous and the situation varied depending on the circumstances of their immigration into their new host country, as well as their culture, language skills, educational level, professional experience, gender etc.

Sufficient knowledge of the language of the host country was vital for successful integration and personal independence. Insufficient knowledge of the host country language prevented ageing migrants from benefiting fully from various social services. Furthermore, the transfer of pension rights and the right to social security were essential for them. Many among them would like to return to their country of origin but realised that this would not be possible financially, as their pension rights might not be transferable to their country of origin. The situation here varied considerably from one Council of Europe member state to another. In conclusion, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population had presented six amendments.

The President said that seven amendments to the draft recommendation were being tabled, including six on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population. In going through the amendments, he asked the Standing Committee if it could approve them. Amendments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were **adopted**.

The President then put to the vote the draft recommendation set out in Doc. 11179, as amended. It was **adopted** unanimously [Recommendation 1796 (2007)].

14. ENVIRONMENT, AGRICULTURE AND LOCAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Capture of carbon dioxide as a means of fighting climate change

Doc. 11180
Amendments

Rapporteur of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs: Mr Vladimir Grachev (Russia, EDG)

Mr Grachev presented the report on "Capture of carbon dioxide as a means of fighting climate change" (Doc. 11180). The question no longer needed to be asked whether global warming was in fact occurring. It was, and the time had come for speedy and resolute action. His report, in the preparation of which he had been able to benefit from his Committee's full support, pointed to carbon dioxide capture and storage technologies as an efficient means to fight global warming, alongside a drastic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions via energy savings and alternative energies.

Even though good technologies existed, it was important to develop them further. The report looked beyond the implementation of the Kyoto protocol in foreseeing the development of so-called 'carbon sinks', constituted for instance by forests, soils and even oceans, which latter had a natural capacity to absorb and store carbon dioxide from the air. Council of Europe member states should therefore develop the capture and storage of carbon dioxide and implement international, national and local policies and measures to develop carbon sinks. His report provided an extensive analysis of what could be done.

Mr Schmied, Chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, underlined the importance of the report which well explained the carbon capture issue and could be used as a blueprint for action by Council of Europe member states and others.

The President said that three amendments and three sub-amendments to the draft recommendation were being tabled.

Mr Schmied moved amendment No. 1 and two sub-amendments. Amendment No. 1 as sub-amended was **adopted**.

Amendment No 2 was **rejected**.

Mr Grachev moved an oral amendment to paragraph 12.10.5 which was **agreed** to.

Mr Schmied moved amendment No. 3 and a sub-amendment. Amendment No. 3 as sub-amended was **adopted**.

The President put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11180, as amended. It was **adopted** unanimously [Resolution 1552 (2007)].

15. MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND POPULATION

Missing persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions

Doc. 11196
Amendment

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Migrations, Refugees and Population:
Mr Leo Platvoet (Netherlands, UEL)*

Mr Platvoet presented the report "Missing persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions" (Doc.11196). He had tried to stay away as far as possible from political considerations. Few people knew about the tragedies covered in the report. He had throughout benefited from good cooperation with the three countries concerned. Still, cooperation between them, for instance in mapping sites where missing people might have been buried, could be much improved. He pointed to the importance of the work of, in particular, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In his report he also mentioned the possibility that some of those presumed dead were in fact alive, even though this could not be confirmed by the various sides to the conflicts. The report contained numerous proposals for clarifying the fate of the missing persons, and for assisting those left behind and the various parties to the conflicts in healing the scars of the past.

Mr Herkel commended Mr Platvoet on his report, which in fact reflected thousands of personal tragedies. As monitoring rapporteur for the situation in Azerbaijan he also well knew the conflict involving that country. He was, however, slightly surprised to see that Russia was not mentioned at all in the report, in spite of its significant involvement in the conflicts described. This should be remedied in future reports on related subjects.

Mrs Hajiyeva also congratulated Mr Platvoet on his excellent report. So many families had suffered tragedy. The Parliamentary Assembly had a moral duty to do its best to try clarify what had happened and to make sure there would be no reoccurrence. Some 4,500 people in Azerbaijan went missing - and this all of six years into the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding districts of Azerbaijan still under Armenian occupation. In this context, she referred to Resolution 1416 on "The conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region dealt with by the Minsk OSCE Conference", which *inter alia* urged the parties concerned to "withdraw military forces from any occupied territories".

Mr Torosyan congratulated the Rapporteur who had managed to steer clear of political considerations, focusing instead on the human aspects of these tragedies. The Minsk OSCE Conference continued its

negotiations and these were going well at the moment. Perhaps in addition, there should be meetings within the Parliamentary Assembly context between the various national delegations involved. The Armenian delegation, for its part, would be willing to try this.

Mr Platvoet thanked his colleagues for their valuable statements. He in no way wished to deny the major role played by Russia in these conflicts. As for the identification of the dead, the International Committee of the Red Cross could be very helpful and had to be entrusted with the task by all sides. The issue of the missing persons should be included in the framework of the monitoring procedures of the three countries concerned.

An amendment presented by **Mr Platvoet** on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population was **accepted**.

The President put to the vote the draft resolution, as amended, and the draft recommendation set out in Doc. 11196. They were **adopted** unanimously [Resolution 1553 (2007) and Recommendation 1797 (2007)].

16. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Respect for the principle of gender equality in civil law

Doc. 11177
Amendment

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men:
Mrs Svetlana Smirnova (Russia, EDG)*

Mrs Bilgehan, Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, presented the report on "Respect for the principle of gender equality in civil law" (Doc. 11177). The important subject dealt with in the report was of a sometimes rather legal and technical character. Still, it was essential that it be tackled if one wanted to achieve true gender equality, especially in marriage. A special parliamentary seminar also covering the situation in the Maghreb countries had permitted the identification of several lacunae as regards gender equality.

These included inequalities before the marriage such as the minimum age for marrying. Another concerned the name of the married woman, where certain legislations obliged her to assume the name of her husband. This could lead to a true 'depersonalisation' of the married woman, in that she was considered above all to form part of the family of the husband. Similarly, in certain legislations, the woman could not transmit her surname to her children.

Another source of inequality was the use of foreign discriminatory legislation within the framework of private international relations. For example, French private international law stipulated that family relations be determined by the national law of those concerned. This could lead to a situation where foreign family legislation discriminated against the woman, for example as regards polygamy or marital repudiation of the woman. This could create a conflict between national laws or jurisdictions and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocols. The Committee was therefore convinced that only a new Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights guaranteeing equality between men and women could resolve once and for all any discrimination against women in civil law matters. The report recommended to the Committee of Ministers to establish a new Protocol along these lines.

Mrs Hurskainen fully agreed with the report. Sad examples of discrimination against women in these matters were numerous. In this context she referred to the Minister for Tourism of Pakistan, Ms Nilofar Bakhtiar, who had had to resign because of a hug she had exchanged with a paragliding instructor.

Mrs Bilgehan moved an amendment which **was accepted**, subject to an oral sub-amendment.

The President put to the vote the draft recommendation set out in Doc. 11177, as amended, which was **adopted** unanimously [Recommendation 1798 (2007)].

17. RULES OF PROCEDURE AND IMMUNITIES

Conflict of interests

Doc. 11259

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities:
Mr John Greenway (United Kingdom, EDG)*

Mr Gross, Chairman of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities, presented the report on "Conflict of interest" (Doc. 11259) in the absence of Mr Greenway, Rapporteur. Transparency and accountability were the cornerstones of good governance and democracy at national and international level. This held especially for parliamentarians in the discharge of their duties and therefore also to the Parliamentary Assembly. The core recommendation in the report was that a member of the Parliamentary Assembly who was being considered for rapporteurship in a committee should disclose any personal, professional, financial or economic interest that might be considered relevant to or conflicting with the subject of the report. The same would apply to any speaker during an Assembly debate, who would have to announce any interest of the kinds mentioned that he might have in the subject.

Mr Shybko wondered who was going to examine whether any purported conflict of interest was real or relevant to the case. **Mr Gross** considered that this would fall under the responsibility of the committees.

Mr Eörsi expressed overall agreement with the report but suggested that not only the subject of the report be considered relevant but also the country dealt with. He therefore suggested two oral amendments in paragraph 3 and in paragraph 6.2 respectively.

Both oral amendments were **accepted**.

The President put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11259, as amended. It was **adopted** unanimously [Resolution 1554 (2007)].

18. LEGAL AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The situation of the inhabitants of the British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia

Doc. 11232

*Rapporteur of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights:
Mr Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC)*

Mr Gross presented the report "The situation of the inhabitants of the British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia" (Doc. 11232). His aim in preparing this report had not been political, in that he had left open the question of the legitimacy as such of the British military presence in Cyprus. The aim was instead to highlight the grievances of the inhabitants in the base areas related to, for instance, freedom of movement, use of property, noise caused by aircraft using the Akrotiri airbase, and health concerns including those linked to the presence of high-powered antennae. The draft resolution made concrete proposals to enable the inhabitants to benefit from the European Convention on Human Rights in so far as this was possible. It seemed to him that the longer the United Kingdom delayed resolving the problems associated with the bases, the bigger they would become.

Mr Kyprianou welcomed the report, which usefully addressed specific problems pertaining to human rights and the quality of life of the inhabitants. Their mental and physical health should not be put at risk. It was unacceptable for them to be denied access to European Union structural funds and to be subjected to trials before courts of law of questionable independence. They must have the right to develop their property just as any citizen of the Republic of Cyprus. Indeed, Cypriots viewed these bases as remnants of colonialism. And of course they were, since the Treaty of Establishment of the Republic of Cyprus determining the status of the bases provided that the territory they occupied should remain under the sovereignty of the United Kingdom, which by the way did not pay a penny to the host nation for its use. In reality the Treaty of Establishment conceded almost all rights to the British and all obligations to the Republic of Cyprus. It was therefore important that the recommendations contained in the report be implemented with all due speed.

The President put to the vote the draft resolution set out in Doc. 11232. It was **adopted** with two abstentions [Resolution 1555 (2007)].

19. OTHER BUSINESS

a. **Intention of the Government of Venezuela to close the radio station Radio Caracas (RCTV).**

Mr Van den Brande informed the Committee of the announcement made by the Government of Venezuela threatening to close down Radio Caracas (RCTV) as from 27 May 2007. This was not only illegal in that it ignored an earlier agreement giving the RCTV the right to broadcast until 2022, but it was also a veritable

infringement of freedom of expression. He asked his colleagues to co-sign with him a declaration that he had drafted and which was now circulating.

b. Use of the Council of Europe's two official languages in the distribution of texts etc.

Mr Schreiner observed that the text of the statement by Mr Jeremić, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, had been distributed only in English but not in French, the other official language of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the Council of Europe exhibition on domestic violence just outside the meeting hall, which would be opened the same day, contained written explanations only in English and Serbian.

The Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly explained that Mr Jeremić's speech had been distributed by the Serbian authorities shortly before the meeting, making it impossible for the Secretariat to have it translated into French in time. However the full statement setting out the priorities of the Serbian Chairmanship existed in both English and French and was in the Standing Committee's files. Finally, he apologised for the absence of French commentary in the Council of Europe exhibition referred to by Mr Schreiner. However the same exhibition had been located in front of the hemicycle during the last Assembly part-session with French commentary.

c. Events in Ukraine

Mr Shybko briefly informed the Standing Committee on the last events in Ukraine.

20. NEXT MEETING

The Standing Committee **confirmed** that the next meeting would be held in Bratislava (Slovakia) on Friday, 23 November 2007.

The meeting **rose** at 1.15 pm.

APPENDIX I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

President of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr René van der LINDEN The Netherlands

Vice-Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr Erik JURGENS The Netherlands
 Mr Bernard SCHREINER France
 Mr Per-Kristian FOSS Norway
 Mr Walter SCHMIED Switzerland
 Mr Cezar Florin PREDA Romania
 Mr Andrea RIGONI Italy
 Mr Miloš ALIGRUDIĆ Serbia
 Mr Karol KARSKI Poland

Chairpersons of Political Groups

Mr Lluís Maria de PUIG Socialist Group
 Mr Luc Van den BRANDE Group of the European People's Party
 Mr Mátyás EÖRSI Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
 Mr Mikhail MARGELOV European Democrat Group
 Mr Tiny KOX Group of the Unified European Left

Chairpersons of national delegations

Mr Tigran TOROSYAN Armenia
 Mrs Gisela WURM Austria
 Mr Jean-Pol HENRY Belgium
 Mr Mladen IVANIĆ Bosnia and Herzegovina
 Mr Andros KYPRIANOU Cyprus
 Mr Andres HERKEL Estonia
 Mrs Sinikka HURSKAINEN Finland
 Mr Bernard SCHREINER France
 Mrs Elsa PAPADIMITRIOU Greece
 Mr Zoltán SZABÓ Hungary
 Mr Jean-Charles GARDETTO Monaco
 Mr Dirk DEES The Netherlands
 Mr Göran LINDBLAD Sweden
 Mr Vitaliy SHYBKO Ukraine

Chairperson of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development

Mr Konstantinos VRETTOS (SOC) Greece

Chairperson of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education

Mr Jacques LEGENDRE (EPP/CD) France

Chairperson of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs

Mr Walter SCHMIED (ALDE) Switzerland

Chairperson of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Mrs Gülsün BİLGEHAN (SOC) Turkey

Chairperson of the Committee on Rules of Procedure and Immunities

Mr Andreas GROSS (SOC) Switzerland

Rapporteurs (not members of the Standing Committee)

Mr Vladimir GRACHEV Russia
 Mr Leo PLATVOET Netherlands
 Mr Paul WILLE Belgium

Also present:**Other members of the Parliamentary Assembly**

Mr Ștefan GLAVĂN Romania
 Mrs Gultakin HAJIYEVA Azerbaijan
 Mr Egidijus VAREIKIS Lithuania

Invited Personalities

Mr Oliver DULIĆ, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia
 Mr Vuk JEREMIĆ, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia,
 Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers

Permanent Representatives to the Council of Europe

Mr Viacheslav EGOROV, Deputy to the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the Council of Europe
 Mrs Sladjana PRICA, Ambassador of Serbia to the Council of Europe
 Mr Christian TER-STEPANIAN, Ambassador of Armenia to the Council of Europe

Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly

Mr Mateo SORINAS, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly
 Mr Wojciech SAWICKI, Director General of the Parliamentary Assembly
 Mr Kjell TORBIÖRN, Head of the Office of the Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly and Head of Secretariat of the Bureau of the Assembly
 Mr Petr SICH, Head of the Private Office of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly
 Mrs Valérie CLAMER, Secretary of the Standing Committee
 Mrs Bonnie THEOPHILOVA-PERMAUL, Deputy Head of the Private Office of the President of the Parliamentary Assembly
 Mrs Sylvie AFFHOLDER, Co-Secretary of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men
 Mr Lamine DIALLO, Deputy Secretary of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men

Council of Europe

Mrs Maud DE BOER-BUQUICCHIO, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe
 Mrs Mireille PAULUS, Deputy Secretary of the Committee of Ministers
 Mrs Stefania KRUGER, Advisor, Private Office of the Secretary General and of the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

APPENDIX II**SYNOPSIS**

The **Standing Committee**, meeting on 24 May 2007 in Belgrade with first Mr van der Linden, President of the Assembly, and then Mr Jurgens, Vice-President of the Assembly, in the chair:

- heard a welcome address by Mr Oliver Dulić, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia;
- held an exchange of views with Mr Vuk Jeremić, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers;
- ratified the credentials of new members of the Assembly submitted by the delegations of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Romania and Sweden;
- ratified the changes in the composition of general Assembly committees in respect of the delegations of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Romania and Sweden;
- ratified the references and modifications of references proposed by the Bureau which are contained in Appendix I hereafter;
- held an exchange of views on the observation of the parliamentary elections in Armenia (12 May 2007), and took note that the written report would be debated during the Assembly June part-session;
- adopted, on behalf of the Assembly, the following texts:

Opinion 264 (2007)	Budgets of the Council of Europe for the financial year 2008
Opinion 265 (2007)	Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2008
Resolution 1552 (2007)	Capture of carbon dioxide as a means of fighting climate change
Resolution 1553 (2007)	Missing persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions
Resolution 1554 (2007)	Conflict of interests
Resolution 1555 (2007)	The situation of the inhabitants of the British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia
Recommendation 1795 (2007)	Monitoring of commitments as regards social rights
Recommendation 1796 (2007)	The situation of elderly persons in Europe
Recommendation 1797 (2007)	Missing persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions
Recommendation 1798 (2007)	Respect for the principle of gender equality in civil law;

- confirmed that the next meeting of the Standing Committee will be held in Bratislava (Slovakia) on Friday, 23 November 2007.

APPENDIX 1

Decisions on documents tabled for reference to committees

A. REFERENCES TO COMMITTEES

Reference No. 3345 **Follow-up to the current affairs debate
Sudan and Darfur – Europe's responsibility**

Reference to the Committee on Migration, refugees and Population for report

Reference No. 3346 **Doc. 11245
Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Hancock and others
Attitude to memorials to fighters against fascism in Council of Europe
member states**

*Reference to the Political Affairs Committee for report
[PACE priority: Strengthening the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance]*

Reference No. 3347 **Doc. 11246
Motion for a recommendation presented by Mrs Bilgehan and others
The rights of today's girls: the rights of tomorrow's women**

*Reference to the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for report
[PACE priority: Promoting common fundamental values: fighting against discrimination]*

Reference No. 3348 **Doc. 11247
Motion for a resolution presented by Ms Čurdová and others
The position of women in science in Europe**

Transmission to the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for information

Reference No. 3349 **Doc. 11249
Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Jurgens and others
Plight of the ethnic Macedonian national minority of northern Greece**

Transmission to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights for information

Reference No. 3350 **Doc. 11251
Motion for a recommendation presented by Mr Dupraz and others
Preserving the environment by energy savings in public administrations and
the Council of Europe**

Transmission to the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs for information

Reference No. 3351 **Doc. 11252
Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Melnikov and others
Discriminatory amendments to the Estonian law on language**

Transmission to the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) for information

Reference No. 3352 **Doc. 11254
Motion for a resolution presented by Mr Walter and others
The promotion of Internet and online media services appropriate for minors**

*Reference to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education for report at the Standing Committee
[PACE priority: Promoting common fundamental values: strengthening the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups]*

B. MODIFICATION OF A REFERENCE**Doc. 10623****Motion for a resolution presented by Mrs Hurskainen and others****Blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion****Ref. No. 3122 of 1 September 2005**

Reference to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education for report, and to the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights and the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men for opinion

C. EXTENSION OF REFERENCES**1. Doc. 9869****Motion for a recommendation presented by Mr Bindig and others****Video surveillance of public areas****Ref. No. 2864 of 8 September 2003 (extended on 24 June 2005 until 30 June 2007)**

Extension until 31 December 2007

2. Doc. 10552**Motion for a recommendation presented by Mr Randegger and others****Vocational Education and Training, a key factor for lifelong employability****Ref. No. 3094 of 6 June 2005 – validity : 6 June 2007**

Extension until 31 January 2008

3. Current affairs debate of 21 June 2005**The situation in the Republics of Central Asia****Ref. No. 3113 of 24 June 2005 – validity: 24 June 2007**

Extension until 31 December 2007

4. Doc. 10555**Declaration on the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe****Implementation of the third summit declaration and action plan****Ref. No. 3095 of 6 June 2005 – validity: 6 June 2007**

Extension until 31 December 2007.

APPENDIX III**SPEECH BY H.E. MR. VUK JEREMIĆ
CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

I am honoured to address you for the first time in my capacity as the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Before proceeding, let me say that during the four years of our membership in the Council of Europe, the institutions and values on which the Council was founded—and from which it continues to draw strength—have significantly contributed to the democratic consolidation of the social, political and constitutional fabric of the Republic of Serbia.

That is why my country remains fully committed to making significant progress on building a Europe without divisions, without borders—on building One Europe, a Europe where not only states and politicians, but also citizens, the true stakeholders of our vision, join together to deepen the values we all share. Only in this way can we form a community for a common democratic future.

The myriad responsibilities that come with chairing the Council of Ministers are both an honour and a challenge for the Republic of Serbia—and for me personally. I want to assure that you that we intend to move full speed ahead on implementing the Priorities of our chairmanship, as well as acknowledge the critical role the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly can play in moving our agenda forward. Together, we can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of the Council of Europe and the common values that frame our work.

I assume the chairmanship at a crucial moment for both the Council of Europe and the Republic of Serbia: two years after the historic Third Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw in May 2005, and two years before the 60th anniversary of the organization itself. We will build on the positive momentum and the spirit of continuity reinforced by the four countries that have chaired the Committee of Ministers since the Third Summit—Portugal, Romania, the Russian Federation and San Marino—and I want to emphasise that implementing the Warsaw Declaration and the Action Plan will be two foci of our chairmanship.

Another focus of Serbia's chairmanship will be to begin the concrete implementation of the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

It is of great significance that the text of the Memorandum clearly indicates that the Council of Europe remains the benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe. This reaffirmation of the central role of our organisation in the European construction, which of course is of the utmost importance, is to be put to the credit of your Assembly.

Beyond the Memorandum of Understanding, the May 2007 Ministerial Session led to the adoption of the first series of decisions following up on the Juncker report, to which your Assembly has always attached particular attention.

More specifically, the Committee of Ministers has decided to revise the procedure for the election of the Secretary General in order to enhance his or her political profile and, accordingly, the visibility of the organization. We are counting on the support of your Assembly to set this new procedure in motion.

Beyond the election of the Secretary General, the Committee agreed that regular reports on the follow-up given to the Juncker recommendations should be presented at future Ministerial Sessions.

The Republic of Serbia is fully committed to the Council of Europe's leadership role in fostering a more inclusive and tolerant environment in which multilateral dialogue can take place at all levels. In this way, the vision of building a fully democratic Europe without divisions—of building One Europe, Our Europe—can become a reality we can all benefit from.

A crucial component in building a Europe without division is reconciliation. Democracy cannot flourish without a full and open account of the past. That is why the Republic of Serbia is strongly committed to full and immediate cooperation with the ICTY. All indictees must be located, arrested, and extradited.

This is not only our international obligation; it is our moral duty—to our neighbours and the world, of course, but foremost to ourselves.

Only by breaking with our recent past can true justice be served. It is the European way forward.

It is my privilege to present, in outline form, the four priorities of our chairmanship unified under the slogan “One Europe, Our Europe.”

- First, promoting the core values of the Council of Europe—human rights, minority rights, democracy and the rule of law. This will be advanced through the enhancement of the effectiveness and implementation of the Conventions system, monitoring mechanisms, as well as those connected to democracy consolidation initiatives.
- Second, enhancing the security of individuals. We plan on pursuing this priority through the intensification of multilateral and regional efforts at combating terrorism, organized crime, the trafficking of persons and drugs, and corruption.
- Third, building a more tolerant, humane and inclusive Europe. We will work to emphasise a European identity that respects our common heritage, while at the same time encouraging diversity as a source of strength and a force for progressive cohesion.
- Our fourth priority will focus on fostering the full and explicit European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans. Fully incorporating this region—my region—into the European Union is in the interest of the Council of Europe and can be further encouraged by supporting regional cooperation initiatives.

I will speak briefly to each of these four priority areas.

Serbia will work to enhance the long-term effectiveness of the Council of Europe’s system of human rights protection. I am glad that the Ministerial Session confirmed the determination of member states to secure this objective, which is crucial.

Two of the most important pillars of the European system of human rights protection are the European Convention on Human Rights—the ECHR—and the European Court of Human Rights. Serbia will actively promote the long-term effectiveness of these two embodiments of the values of Europe—values that binds us one to another as never before in the long, long history of the Old Continent.

The entry into force of Protocol 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights is of essential importance for the enhanced effectiveness of the Conventions system. We will work to improve and strengthen national implementation mechanisms, including increasing the effectiveness of national judiciaries.

Serbia considers the full implementation of the ECHR and other conventions to be essential tools for the further consolidation of democratic stability and will put forward initiatives in that light.

A core principle of the Council of Europe is the championing of the interdependence of democracy, individual liberty, and human rights—namely the belief that what makes a country democratic is not merely the holding of elections. As such, Serbia will continue to fully support the work of the Forum for the Future of Democracy. I look forward to attending its third session in mid-June in Sweden.

I know that your Assembly will actively participate in this event. Serbia is eager to work with the Assembly in this context, as well as on many other issues, during our chairmanship.

The second priority area is enhancing the security of individuals. Serbia will work to achieve more effective trans-national cooperation to combat a whole slew of issues that could detrimentally affect Europe’s security architecture. I am referring primarily to terrorism and organized crime.

Not coincidentally, the fight against terrorism and organized crime was the theme of the Regional Heads of State Summit that President Tadić hosted last October. The resulting Joint Declaration recognized that concerted action is a necessary pre-requisite for the security of each country, the region, and Europe as a whole. It stated forcefully that terrorism constitutes the gravest threat to peace, stability and democratic development and pledged active and intense cooperation at all levels.

Of course, enhancing the security of individuals is not achieved through the fight against terrorism and organized crime alone. Actionable issues such as intolerance, exclusion, racism, xenophobia, domestic

violence, discrimination, corruption, and the trafficking of persons and drugs are also crucial if we are to make headway in the areas of enhancing of the security of individuals.

Our third priority is the promotion of a more tolerant, humane and inclusive Europe. Under this heading, Serbia will work to emphasise a European identity that respects our common heritage, while at the same time encouraging diversity as a source of strength and a force for progressive cohesion.

In line with the efforts of the Russian and San Marino chairmanships—and being ourselves a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country—Serbia attaches significant importance to intercultural dialogue. We hope that a White Paper on this topic will be completed by November so that we can host an informal ministerial conference on this topic. We plan on supporting initiatives that emphasise the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue.

An inclusive Europe is a Europe that helps empower local communities and individuals by establishing a level playing field for all. The Serbian chairmanship will work to advance the equality of opportunity of all Europeans, which means building capacities for children, youth, and women, as well as individuals with physical and mental disabilities, and members of other marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as the Roma and Travellers. Programs that help educate, empower and employ the most vulnerable members of our diverse societies will receive particular attention during our chairmanship.

Our fourth priority focuses on advancing the full and explicit European Union membership perspective of the Western Balkans. Serbia's chairmanship plans to further encourage the region's accession drive by working to strengthen regional cooperation and fostering regional cohesion.

History serves as a reminder of what can happen when the Western Balkans loose sight of the way forward: The promised peace dividend of the implosion of communism almost two decades ago materialised in the Western Balkans only after a tragic decade of conflict and civil war in which so many Europeans needlessly perished.

It took the coming onto the scene of a new generation of regional leaders to further the tradition of European integration and the European practice of reconciliation—leaders untainted with the tribal hatreds unleashed by those who perverted the heritage that binds us to one another.

We cannot change grim historical facts, but we can work together to make sure conflict and war in Europe never happen again.

The Serbian chairmanship will strive to further raise the Council of Europe's profile throughout the region, so as to strengthen its core values in this part of Europe. I believe that never before in this region's history has such a concrete opportunity to overcome regional strife and conflict presented itself, as the one before us now.

The concreteness of the opportunity to once and forever grasp the common destiny that we have always shared is due in large part to the EU membership perspective that is within our reach. Without this credible and clear perspective, the external incentives to reform disappear. The region could return to division and strife—and hatred, and war, and terrible misery. Stability would not take root, and prosperity would remain illusive.

And therefore it is our solemn duty to work together to make Europe truly whole, permanently free and always at peace.

To that end, Serbia will organise a number of regional events that promote inter-regional, trans-frontier and cross-border cooperation. And we will enhance the level of contacts between the Council of Europe and, respectively, the South East European Cooperation Process, the European Union, the OSCE and the United Nations.

In working on all these priorities, we will also encourage the close cooperation between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly.

By way of conclusion I will say a few words in my capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia. I will speak on a matter of paramount importance not only to my country—but to the stability and the future of the Western Balkans, all of Europe, and many regions beyond.

I refer to the question of the future status of Serbia's southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, under UN administration since June 1999.

How its status is resolved will shed a light on the true strength of our common European values, for the question of Kosovo and Metohija must be solved in a European way.

Our country's proposal both respects the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia while at the same time enables our ethnic-Albanian citizens in Kosovo and Metohija to satisfy their legitimate demand for substantial self-governance. Our proposal avoids a maximalist solution that produces winners and losers in a region where revenge for perceived wrongs and losses has been a constant factor of instability. Unfortunately, the Ahtisaari Plan, as submitted to the Security Council, embraces a maximalist solution—the independence of Kosovo—that is nothing other than the forced partition of Serbia.

If the Ahtisaari Plan gets endorsed, it would be the *first time* in contemporary history that territory would be taken away from a sovereign country without the consent of its democratically elected authorities, in order to satisfy the secessionist aspirations of a particular ethnic group. This would lead to the undermining of the whole architecture of international order.

A dangerous precedent would be created, despite all attempts to claim otherwise. Precedents cannot be announced or denied, they just happen.

Despite the proverbial late hour, I still believe that a window of opportunity remains open for further talks aimed at achieving a compromise, mutually acceptable solution for the future status of Kosovo and Metohija.

Bear in mind that Serbia has never lost sight of the strategic imperatives informing our approach: strengthening democracy and consolidating regional stability, respecting European values, and working hard toward achieving the promise of peace and prosperity that Europe delivers.

On the question of continuing the negotiations process, therefore, I expect your understanding and ask for your support.

I sincerely look forward to working with all of you, and thank you for your attention.