

2 October 2006

Bureau of the Assembly

Statement by the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian uprising of 1956

1. As Europe observes the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian uprising of October 1956, this provides an occasion for both sadness and joy. Sadness at the many lives tragically lost in what turned out to be a failed attempt to restore a people's liberty and national independence. But also joy at today's freedom and independence - not only of Hungary but of many other European nations which at the time found themselves in a similarly desperate situation.

2. The popular uprising that started in Hungary in October 1956 imperceptibly sowed seeds of hope among the suppressed and of self-doubt among the rulers. Seeds that would eventually lead, after years of oppression and international tension, first to 'détente' and cautious economic reform, particularly in Hungary but also elsewhere in central and eastern Europe in the 1960s; to the Helsinki Final Act and the creation of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in the 1970s; to the rise of the Solidarity trade union in Poland and internal reforms in the Soviet Union in the 1980s; and, finally, to the overcoming of the division of Europe in the early 1990s and to the spread of democracy across the entire European continent, including the area of the former Soviet Union itself.

3. Seen in this context, the Hungarian revolution of 1956 was, for all its tragedy and human suffering, a seminal event of immense moral value, to which the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly - even at that time and virtually alone among international organisations - gave its full moral and political support.

4. Thus, in its Recommendation 105, adopted on 26 October 1956 –three days into the uprising - the Assembly said it “welcomes the brave demonstrations of the unmistakable popular desire for independence and freedom in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and expresses its deep sympathy with the victims of oppression”. The Assembly asked that “freedom of decision by the people, guaranteed by free elections, should be restored there” and expressed the belief that “full self-determination for these people can alone ensure a lasting peace in central and eastern Europe”. And in its Recommendation 132 of 11 January 1957, the Assembly “pays tribute to the courageous resistance of the Hungarian people which has demonstrated to the world that the political system imposed upon it was powerless to quell mankind’s profound desire for freedom”.

5. Since 1990, when Hungary joined the Council of Europe, the country has been extremely active in promoting the values of the organisation, whether in the Committee of Ministers or in the Parliamentary Assembly – as witnessed, for instance, in the establishment, in 1995, of a Council of Europe “European Youth Centre” in Budapest. The placement of the Centre in Budapest is of symbolic importance, given the prominent role played in the revolution by what Hungarians still lovingly remember as “the lads of Pest” – that is, the boys from the working-class areas of the city who were among the first to demonstrate and give their lives in the uprising.

6. On this solemn day of remembrance, it is the duty of this new and united Europe of ours to uphold the values of freedom, human rights, democracy and the rule of law that inspired the Hungarian and other European peoples at that time. These values must never be taken for granted but must be fought for and defended by every new generation of Europeans. The Assembly, as the parliamentary organ of the Council of Europe, has since the Organisation’s foundation in 1949 tirelessly pursued these worthy aims and will continue to do so, on behalf of its 46 member states against any possible new threats against these values, from whatever direction they may come. Today the Assembly thank Hungary for its inestimable contribution to the cause of freedom.