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Address by

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Mr. President,

I would like to start by saying that it is a pleasure for me to be here, and to thank you for your kind words of welcome. It is a privilege for me to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, - a true fountain of European political culture. I know how parliamentarians of my own country look to Strasbourg as a source of inspiration and opportunity for sharing experience and learning.

Built on the ruins of our European tragedy the aim of the founding members of the Council of Europe was to strengthen the common heritage of European values. A more united Europe, based on individual freedom and the rule of law was seen as a prime line of defence against new frightful nationalistic quarrels among European nations.

For more than four decades, this organization has served as a beacon of European civilization and served us well. In the field of human rights in particular, we have developed a fine texture of supervisory and judiciary functions securing the weak and curtailing the risk of arbitrariness.

But while the Council was designed to embrace the whole of Europe, oppression descended on millions of people no less European than we in the West. This could not continue. The systems were unable to meet the economic, political and cultural needs of the people. inalienable rights were being crushed. Our aspirations in that contradictory world were summed up by British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, who when asked some fifty years ago about the goals of his policy simply said: "I want to be able to go down to Victoria Station and buy a ticket to wherever I want to go in this World".

The downfall of communism and of the totalitarian regimes, however, opened new and promising avenues. After the first flush of enthusiasm we have now woken up to a difficult and even brutal reality. We are faced with new and different problems, which sometimes overshadow the positive developments

and achievements that have already been made.

It is significant that the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe have turned to the Council of Europe, seeking cooperation and membership, as one of their first steps on the road to full participation in European cooperation.

By meeting the needs of the new and prospective member countries in a flexible and innovative manner, the Council of Europe has demonstrated its ability to adapt to the new situation. Making the resources and expertise of the Council generously available to these countries must remain a top priority of our organization in the years to come.

In the long run everyone stands to gain from the widest possible adherence to the basic principles that represent the sine qua non of the Council of Europe: Respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Almost all the main areas of activity of the Council of Europe have a direct bearing on the functioning of democratic societies. Directly linked to the question of human rights is the issue of equal rights and equal opportunities for women. The efforts made by the Council in this important area are of great value, and must be pursued.

Inter-governmental cooperation on legal affairs, on education and culture, on youth activities and on local and regional government are all areas where the Council has shown that it has an important role to play.

The Council of Europe combines inter-governmental and parliamentary cooperation, and is based on a set of conventions covering important issues directly related to the functioning of democracy. Thus, it provides a framework well suited for a comprehensive, in-depth approach to the challenges inherent in the on-going process of change in Europe.

In order to make the transitional - from East-West confrontation to East-West co-operation - as smooth as possible, joint efforts will be needed on the part of all relevant regional organisations, such as the the Council of Euroep, the CSCE, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the European Community. The relationship between these institutions should consequently be seen in terms of complementarity rather than rivalry - and forces should be joined to help secure the vulnerable foundation of post-Cold War Europe.

Mr. President,

The crisis in former Yugoslavia is the most serious conflict in Europe since the Second World War and a tragedy for its victims. I venture to say: All of Europe has been victimized.

We are faced with armed conflict, widespread human suffering and destruction on our own doorstep, and we seem unable to do much about it.

In spite of strenuous efforts by the UN, the EC and the entire international community, the fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues unabated, cruelly frustrating even our attempts to bring humanitarian relief to the civilian population.

The resumption of hostilities in Croatia entails serious risk of further escalation defying the call for a ceasefire and respect for UN activities as demanded by the UN Security Council Resolution 802.

The negotiations in Geneva, chaired by Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, represent perhaps the only chance to settle the conflict by political means. Our unresolved challenge is how to bring further pressure on the parties and persuade them to accept the peace plan.

One of the most tormenting aspects of the conflict has been the widespread, flagrant violations of human rights and international law. We have witnessed the intolerable practice of ethnic cleansing, indiscriminate artillery bombardment of besieged cities, torture and killing of prisoners in detention camps, and the outrageous practice of mass rape, particularly of Muslim women.

Never since the Second World War has Europe seen such atrocities. At the UN General Assembly last September, I advocated the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute all those responsible for the war crimes now being committed. While support for the idea was sluggish at first, this picture seems to be changing.

We must now support the on-going efforts by the UN and the CSCE regarding the conditions for setting up such a tribunal. Lord Owen's suggestion in this Assembly to establish, with the assistance of the Council of Europe, a special human rights mechanism within the framework of the new constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and possibly in other states as well, would be an important contribution. The difficulties involved in bringing those responsible to justice should not be minimized. We must, however, make it clear that there are limits to what we can and will tolerate.

While we must be consistent in our condemnation of atrocity, we must continue to give the highest priority to the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, and in particular to refugees and displaced persons. The parties' lack of respect for the UNHCR's humanitarian relief convoys is a matter of serious concern in this context. We are glad that steps have been taken to increase protection of the convoys.

Norway has put great emphasis on humanitarian assistance to

former Yugoslavia, and we are the third largest contributor to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' programme in former Yugoslavia after the USA and the EC Commission.

Norwegian military and civilian personnel participate in the UNPROFOR, and our presence will be further increased through the Nordic UN battalion which will soon be dispatched to Macedonia. We must prevent the conflict from spreading and remain fully committed to the cooperative international efforts to end this tragic conflict, not only for the sake of the region itself and its people, but because of the danger of a European brush fire.

Former Yugoslavia is the gravest crisis we are facing today, but the risk that ethnic strife and nationalism may trigger other conflicts must be taken seriously. The international community must act with extreme caution. The task of consolidating democracy and of ensuring economic reform and economic and social development in the former East bloc countries is probably far more demanding than we first believed. And these challenges are occurring at a time when Western Europe is also confronted with serious economic problems of its own.

There is a risk that countries will turn inwards, and that each country or even each region will seek its own solutions. This is a destructive approach. I would like to stress as strongly as possible: The problems of today's and tomorrow's Europe can only be met through cooperative efforts. The only realistic path for a Europe heading towards the third millennium is strengthened European cooperation. This is the overall challenge which we shall have to meet: We must shape a European cooperation tailored to the magnitude of the problems which must be solved.

Mr. President,

If the countries of Europe are unable to organize, where else in the world can we expect international cooperation to succeed?

But how can we succeed in supporting democracy and the rule of law in other countries if serious doubts can be raised about the situation of minorities and people of different nationalities and origins within our own societies?

How can we provide leadership if we ourselves become part of the problem rather than part of the solution?

How can we speak of equal rights and opportunities, conciliation and the need to act in good faith if in our own countries we are unable to curb animosity, fear and discrimination against people of different ethnic backgrounds?

Unemployment, lack of knowledge and insecurity about the future are among the root causes of racism, extreme

nationalism, xenophobia and intolerance which we see in too many countries in Europe today, including my own.

If people go idle we risk creating new victims to the seductive voice of populist, undemocratic, irresponsible demagogy. I am stunned to see that politicians in my own country are thinking of making immigration a main theme in the parliamentary election campaign this fall. The risk that innocent people will be victimized by such appalling speculation is clear.

We must work on many fronts. We must create new opportunities for employment. The EC is planning to provide incentives for growth, and the EC and EFTA countries are working on a Norwegian initiative for a joint effort to create investment, improve education, and to put Western Europe to work again.

Knowledge is an infinite resource and the basis for human understanding. Knowledge is the key to innovation and to active participation in modern society.

We would be making a historical mistake and doing a great disservice to our people if we fail to make it a priority of the first order to improve our education systems. It is essential for improving growth and for changing the quality of growth. It is a key factor in solving environmental problems.

But while we are healing our economies and strengthening our democracies, we should, as an immediate step, make a concentrated effort to upgrade our societies.

We must aim at restoring a situation that should be self-evident after a century so devastating but also promising for Europe, where, in the words of Martin Luther King Jr. all people are judged "not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

More and more frequent reports are coming in, describing organized as well as spontaneous acts of racism and racially motivated harassment in our societies. We have seen people in large numbers not only advocating but exercising violence against groups or individuals with different physical characteristics, cultures or religions. We have seen the face of hatred, of fear and despair. We have seen the tragic, even fatal consequences, 50 years after Holocaust and the darkest chapters in European history.

We shall fight this with the strength of our joint resolve and the best of our common heritage and with the universal tolerance which should be the hallmark of our common European house. This is a moral imperative. What did Mahathma Gandhi say when asked about Western civilization? He said it would be a good idea. We cannot allow it to remain so when our own characters are being tested. For those who turn a blind eye to racism will become accessories to prejudice and violence, and society at large will suffer.

The fight against racism must be fought in many different arenas. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, recognizes the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. These values were echoed and amplified in the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, a landmark in the development of international humanitarian law.

The Council of Europe is founded on legally binding instruments in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and has developed comprehensive competence and expertise within this area. The closest possible cooperation between the countries of Europe in this and related areas will contribute to a solid foundation for broader political cooperation throughout our continent, by establishing a "wide European democratic and legal area" - so aptly defined by the Secretary General as being the principal role of the Council.

The normative basis we need is largely in place. What is needed now is a renewed commitment. A commitment to engage in sustained, systematic and long-term efforts - painful as this may be - to combat the ugly face of racism in all its manifestations. We need to adopt a comprehensive European Plan of Action against Racism, Xenophobia and Intolerance, and I can think of no better forum to make this proposal a reality than the Council of Europe.

The purpose of such a plan of action would be threefold:

First, to give new political impetus to restoring tolerance at national level, by governments and by individuals and non-governmental organizations.

Second, to inspire a more comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach, addressing not only the symptoms but possible root causes such as poverty, socio-economic conditions and unemployment.

Third, to promote closer cooperation in such endeavours between members of the Council of Europe.

A main feature of a plan of action should be to mobilize the strength, support and imagination of the young people of Europe in building fences against the resurgence of racism, intolerance and xenophobia in all our countries. Together with the younger generation, let us build a coalition for tolerance and dignity. Let us forge a community of purpose with the great number of non-governmental organizations and individuals who are already working tirelessly in this field.

In Norway, the Government has already initiated cooperation with the youth organizations of the political parties. We are working on a national youth campaign run by the political youth organizations themselves and supported by the

Government.

I invited the leaders of these youth organizations to a meeting in order to explore, by means of a dialogue, what was the common ground between us.

Representing parties ranging from the far left to the far right, the youth leaders nevertheless agreed, that even though they disagreed on many issues they decided to work on the following basis:

We must fight xenophobia. Violence, harassment and discrimination based on race, colour, culture or religion cannot be tolerated. Everyone living in Norway shall have the same rights and responsibilities regardless of nationality, race or religion.

There was widespread agreement to try to agree on an objective description of the content of our immigration policy, but also agreement that a common characterization of the policy was probably too ambitious.

They will consider how to discourage their mother parties from using xenophobia, even subtly, in the coming election campaign.

They agreed that discrimination short of harassment, often unconscious, was far more widespread than violent racism, but nonetheless of great importance.

These young people met in my office, as politicians and as human beings. If their sincerity can influence the national campaign, as I believe it will, we may have done a service to our country and to dignity.

I recommend this approach for consideration by other countries and by the Council of Europe. At stake is Europe. All our countries are affected. We are all involved and responsible.

A European youth campaign would mean that the young people in Europe can unite in a common struggle for our common European values. Such a campaign could have a core of common activities and manifestations at European level, as well as a core of common information material, assisting and inspiring parallel national campaigns in all the member countries adapted to the situation in each country.

A European youth campaign should form a central part of the broader plan of action. It must also include activities by governments and non-governmental organizations as well as by the Council of Europe itself. In addition to the youth campaign, a Plan of Action could include the following elements:

- Renewed commitment by governments to use the full potential of their legal systems, administrative procedures, educational systems and information agencies

to counter all forms of discrimination against national, ethnic and religious minorities.

- Increased research into the nature and extent of racial violence, by effectively pooling the public attitudes of people of all ages, in order fully to understand the depth of the problems.
- International cooperation in the field of legal instruments and law enforcement procedures. This could include the creation of a distinct Expert body within the Council of Europe, which would be charged with monitoring member countries' compliance with the legal framework, collecting and exchanging information, and stimulating action at national level.
- Integration of multi-national tolerance into all relevant fields of inter-governmental cooperation within the framework of the Council of Europe, such as education, culture, mass media, migration, youth, and social and economic affairs.

There are indications that while our national laws may be in good order, these laws are not as effective as they should be. Few cases of discrimination are being prosecuted. And it is to be hoped that the number of violations are actually as low.

This is a field where we need the strength of each other's support as well as the benefit of the experience gained in individual countries. We must learn from each other's success stories as well as from our failures.

I propose that the struggle against racism and xenophobia and the establishment of a Plan of Action should become a main issue at the forthcoming Summit of the Council of Europe in October this year. Norway has already introduced ideas and proposals in the preparatory process for the Summit. The support of the Parliamentary Assembly is needed.

Let us jointly and determinedly meet the dangers. Just, equitable societies do not come about by our merely wishing for them. Let us call an emergency discussion on the state of European values, and avoid the danger zones of unchecked extremism and ignorance. We need forceful persuasion, not persuasive force to make Europe a refuge of enlightened diversity.