

## Address given by Walter Schwimmer (Strasbourg, 26 June 2003)

**Caption:** In an address given on 26 June 2003, Walter Schwimmer, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, tries to reassure those who fear that the organisation may lose its importance following major developments in the European Union, such as its enlargement to include ten new Member States or the presentation of a draft Constitution.

**Source:** Statement by Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 26 June 2003). [ON-LINE]. [s.l.]: Council of Europe, [19.08.2003]. Available on

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication%5Fand%5FResearch/Press/Events/2%2E%2DParliamentary%5FAssembly%5FSessions/2003/2003%2D06%5FSummer%5Fsession/disc\\_SG.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/T/E/Communication%5Fand%5FResearch/Press/Events/2%2E%2DParliamentary%5FAssembly%5FSessions/2003/2003%2D06%5FSummer%5Fsession/disc_SG.asp#TopOfPage).

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## Statement by Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 26 June 2003)

### Urgent debate on « The Council of Europe and the Convention on the future of Europe »

Parliamentary Assembly session : 23 - 27 June 2003

*(To be checked against delivered speech)*

On 16 April 2003, during the EU accession ceremony in Athens, many delegates underlined the paramount importance of the Council of Europe's efforts in preparing candidate states for EU membership.

This was again confirmed last week by the President of the Council of the EU and Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister Papandreou, during one of the regular Quadripartite meetings with the EU. He also stressed the Council of Europe's role in the implementation of the EU's policies and strategies, both with regard to the development of the Wider Europe - Neighbourhood relations, as well as the EU's agenda for moving the Western Balkan countries towards European integration

This encouraging language of a coherent European policy and combined efforts, we find again in the excellent report of Mr Pangalos which is under discussion today.

The fact that we can approach the question of the Council of Europe and the Convention on the Future of Europe in such a concrete and forward-looking way is thanks to the previous reports presented to the Assembly by Messrs van der Linden, Prisacaru and Pangalos. It is also thanks to the untiring efforts of the "friends of the Council of Europe" within the Convention, and the most efficient coordinator of this group, René van der Linden.

We are all most grateful to them for their endeavours.

We can, therefore, welcome today that the draft Constitution:

- a. Stipulates in Art. I-7 that "the European Union shall seek accession to the ECHR";  
Indeed, the legal basis for this accession, as well as the political mandate, now exists;
- b. Provides a general provision concerning the establishment of appropriate relations with the Council of Europe;
- c. Confirms the special competence of the Council of Europe in specific fields, such as culture, education, youth and sport;

In this context, I would again stress the pan-European dimension of the European Cultural Convention and the European Social Charter.

Like Mr Pangalos in his report, I strongly argued in my previous memoranda to the Convention, as well as in a specific letter to members of the Convention, in favour of an explicit reference to the Council of Europe in the Chapter on "The Union and its immediate environment". I therefore strongly support the proposed wording in the draft Resolution for Art. I-56 that "the Union shall make full use of the Council of Europe and the other international organisations"

This is also fully in line with the strategy paper "A secure Europe in a better world" presented by High Representative Solana at the Thessaloniki Summit, when he underlined that "for the EU, the strength and effectiveness of the OSCE and the Council of Europe has a particular significance" to assure an effective multilateral system.

As the Rapporteur recalls in para. 52 of the explanatory memorandum, my suggestion, made at this year's

January session, to consider EU associated membership in the Council of Europe would be a political signal demonstrating genuine commitment to a Europe without dividing lines. This would further recognise the role of the non-EU members as equal partners in the European political concert.

The 3rd Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government, which the Committee of Ministers has agreed to organise between autumn 2004 and spring 2005, will be an excellent opportunity to determine the Council of Europe's statutory mission and adjust its activities in relation to an enlarged European Union.

I would personally welcome it if the Summit could be the occasion:

- a. For the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR);
- b. For confirming the pan-European role of the Council of Europe for all its members.

At the Thessaloniki Summit, the European Council stated that the draft Constitution is a good basis for the IGC to start in October. We will all certainly follow the IGC with great interest.

I hope that the forthcoming EU Presidencies of Italy and Ireland will be instrumental in assuring that the results of today's debate will be introduced into the work of the IGC. We all count on the Netherlands, which will be chairing the Committee of Ministers as from November, to represent the Council of Europe in the IGC.

I would like to reply to those who fear that following the enlargement of the EU, the Council of Europe will become less important. I think the opposite.

Of course, we welcome the EU's enlargement and warmly congratulate the acceding countries.

But the Statute of the Council of Europe clearly stipulates that our aim is to bring about greater unity for the whole of Europe.

And to bring about the unity of our continent, the Council of Europe is more necessary than ever.

Therefore, the Council of Europe very much relies on your personal commitment as parliamentarians to use all channels, at home or at the European level, to raise awareness and promote our common vision of a Europe without dividing lines.