

Debates of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on Poland's application for accession (2 October 1990)

Caption: On 2 October 1990, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe considers Poland's application for accession to the Council of Europe.

Source: Council of Europe - Parliamentary Assembly. Official Report. Forty-second ordinary session. 26 September - 4 October 1990. Volume II. Sittings 9 to 18. 1991. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. "Accession of Poland to the Council of Europe (2 October 1990)", p. 439-448.

Copyright: (c) Council of Europe

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/debates_of_the_parliamentary_assembly_of_the_council_of_europe_on_poland_s_application_for_accession_2_october_1990-en-b3ac4939-49c8-42fc-b4ad-a6999f47cc20.html

Last updated: 03/07/2015

Accession of Poland to the Council of Europe (2 October 1990)

(Debate on the report of the Political Affairs Committee, Doc. 6289, amendments and sub-amendment, the oral opinion of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries, the opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Doc. 6307, and vote on the draft opinion contained in Doc. 6289)

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - The next order of the day is the presentation by Sir Geoffrey Finsberg of the report of the Political Affairs Committee in reply to the request for an opinion by the Committee of Ministers on Poland's application for membership of the Council of Europe, Document 6289; the presentation by Mr. Solé-Tura of the oral opinion of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries; and the presentation by Mrs. Lentz-Cornette of the opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, Document 6307.

The list of speakers closed at 12 noon today. Eleven names are on the list, and eight amendments and one sub-amendment have been tabled.

I remind members that the Assembly agreed this morning to limit speaking time as follows: ten minutes for the rapporteur; five minutes for the speakers in the general debate; and seven minutes for the committee's replies.

If we stick to these time-limits, we shall be able to hear all those who have put their names down and finish with the debate, including the vote by 6.30 p.m.

I call Sir Geoffrey Finsberg, Rapporteur of the Political Affairs Committee, to present his report.

Sir Geoffrey FINSBERG (*United Kingdom*). - I hereby present the report on Poland's application for membership of the Council of Europe, which has the full support of the Political Affairs Committee.

I remind my colleagues that Poland was the leader in the race to democracy and freedom among the states of Eastern and Central Europe. Poland has a long history of being occupied and of having her freedom extinguished. Yet, like the proverbial phoenix, she rises again and again from the ashes. I believe that Poland's latest reincarnation gives her the opportunity, within a set of free nations in Europe, to retain her freedom for as long as Europe itself is free. That is why I hope that the process of granting full membership will not be too long delayed.

We have seen the leader of the Polish delegation, Mr Wiackowski, in action in this forum. I am sure that the Assembly will wish to send a message to him about the serious illness of his wife, which is why he is not here. I hope that the Clerk will be able to send him our very best wishes for his wife's recovery.

As I think the Assembly knows, it is not my habit to talk for very long. I have tried to set out in the memorandum what has happened in Poland, and how, in the minds of normal, rational people - what we in Britain call the man on the Clapham omnibus - human rights, individual liberty and a free judiciary are already there. I have talked to people in Poland and they certainly recognise and welcome that state of affairs.

The Assembly will know that the President of Poland has signed the necessary orders and law for the calling of the presidential elections in November. That was done yesterday. All that now remains is for the parliamentary elections - the full parliamentary elections for the Sejm, the Lower House, to be called. That will happen sometime early next year. Colleagues may like to be reminded that the Polish Senate and one third of the Sejm have been freely elected. Moreover, as we have heard on more than one occasion, the Sejm has not obstructed any of the measures that the government has wished to put into effect - not even the decision of the government and the Polish Senate to remove the special privileged pensions of members of the Communist Party. Even though two-thirds of the Sejm were nominally composed of supporters of the old government, it did not seek to stop that happening.

We have seen in action a parliament that is operating in a practical way. We have seen also free local municipal elections. They are more widespread than a general election and are at a much lower level.

The report and the amendments that we shall debate later suggest that, subject to parliamentary elections being held and the presence at them of an observer team, such as that invited to attend elections in the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, and in some of the Yugoslavian republics, and subject also to the team's certification that the election was full and free, when it reports to the Bureau its satisfaction that all requirements were met, the Bureau could so inform the ministers who could then act with promptitude.

One is reminded of the fable about the tortoise and the hare. The race for membership of the Council of Europe was led by Poland, as the favourite, having got under way the process of democratisation and freedom many years before anyone else. However, Poland was overtaken at the winning post, and the proud honour of being first has gone to Hungary. But there is no shame to being second, and I have every hope and expectation that Poland will be the second of our guest members to lose that status and become a full member.

Given that brief introduction, I hope that the Assembly will accept the report, and I shall comment on the amendments when we reach them.

THE PRESIDENT. - Thank you, Sir Geoffrey. You suggested that a telegram should be sent from the Assembly to Mr Wiackowski. I am sure that the President will agree with your suggestion, because that would be a very good way of expressing our sympathy.

I now call Mr. Solé-Tura to present the oral opinion of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries.

Mr. SOLE-TURA (*Spain*) (Interpretation) said that the first aim of the committee had been to reach agreement with the Political Affairs Committee and the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights since the accession of new members had to have the widest possible support. A difficulty was that it was necessary to recognize Poland's pioneering role in the transition to democracy while at the same time strictly observing the Statutes of the Council of Europe. There was a danger that Poland could be disadvantaged because of its pioneering role. It had not so far held full elections because Poland was the first country to move towards democracy and had done so when the Eastern bloc was still intact. Consequently, unlike other countries in the region, the Polish opposition had had to compromise with the government.

Paragraph 6.1 of Sir Geoffrey's report represented the consensus arrived at a meeting in Warsaw. The committees suggested an amendment which would ensure agreement between them. Personally, he opposed the addition of another condition to those arrived at in Warsaw, but felt it was important that decisions on accession should be, so far as possible, unanimous, and had therefore given way. The legal effect of the opinion was clear: the Assembly invited Poland to join the Council of Europe once the condition was met; the invitation was immediately effective and the only thing that was delayed was Poland's full exercise of its rights.

THE PRESIDENT. - I call Mrs. Lentz-Cornette, to present the opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights.

Mrs. LENTZ-CORNETTE (*Luxembourg*) (Translation). - Madam President, allow me first to congratulate Sir Geoffrey Finsberg on his excellent report and the content of his explanatory memorandum. As has been emphasised, the Political Affairs Committee and the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights have jointly tabled two substantive amendments and posed them as prerequisites for the admission of Poland as a full member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Firstly, free and secret national elections have to be arranged in Poland. Up to now, only one chamber - the Senate - has been elected democratically. The Diet still consists of 65% of members appointed by the

communist regime under the former system. It is true that the latter has declared that both houses of parliament will be dissolved by the end of the first quarter of 1991, but the electoral law has not yet been adopted at its second reading.

It is not yet known whether voting will be proportional, follow a majority system or, possibly, be based on a mixed system.

General Jaruzelski is still President of Poland, even though presidential elections are scheduled for the end of November and he was elected for six years. The question now is whether the current President must resign or remain in office until presidential powers are handed over to the new elected President. Furthermore, what powers will the new president have? Nothing has been decided yet. Will the French model be adopted or the German model preferred? You can see there are still many questions unresolved.

For all these reasons, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights considered it premature to hold a debate on the accession of Poland to the Council of Europe.

In addition, in order to become and remain members of the Council of Europe, all countries must respect human rights and the rule of law. On this score, Poland has already accomplished a great deal. On 30 January 1990, the head of the government, Mr. Mazowieski, Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, told us that many laws establishing a legal framework for the independence of the judiciary have been adopted. In accordance with the Constitution, Article 56, paragraph 1, jurisdiction is exercised by the Supreme Court, the ordinary courts and the special courts.

Our committee has not had the opportunity to judge at first hand all these legal achievements, as it did in Budapest for Hungary.

That is why we are asking that a delegation of observers from our Assembly should travel to Poland to observe the legislative elections and see for itself the situation of the judiciary and respect for human rights.

After being informed of the results of this fact-finding visit, our Bureau will undoubtedly give the go-ahead without delay for the full acceptance of Poland as a member of the Council of Europe.

I also think that Polish democrats are being helped by our not accepting their country until the democratic process is truly under way. It would be too easy for the communists in the Diet - including President Jaruzelski and the tens of thousands of Polish communists remaining out of the two million members comprising the Communist Party before the volte-face - to tell their electors that even the Council of Europe had no objection to their standing for election nationally and in accepting them here. We would therefore be affording them indirect publicity!

Distinguished colleagues, the fashion for dictators, be they right wing or left wing, is wearing thin in both West and East. Communism, that mirage which has fascinated too many minds for over half a century, is fading away. And so the democracies, the good old democracies are reverting to what they should never have stopped being: political models, not perfect systems - these do not exist and never will - but regimes of tolerance under which we can think, speak, move around, write, come and go, live and die in peace.

We are lucky to be living through such fascinating times when overwhelming changes are occurring. We are looking forward, a few months hence, to receiving twelve full members from Poland. Let us hope that there will be some women in the delegation, since women comprise over 51% of the Polish population.

Yes, Poland, that country so rich in history and tradition, must stay a little longer in the waiting-room. It will then be the first to leave it on the train to democracy, freedom and progress. We have kept it a first-class seat and are truly delighted to have it sitting at our side.

THE PRESIDENT. - Thank you, Mrs Lentz-Cornette.

The debate is open.

I call first Mr Masseret who will speak on behalf of the Socialist Group. You have seven minutes, Mr Masseret.

Mr MASSERET (*France*) (Translation) Distinguished colleagues, I am speaking on behalf of the Socialist Group in the Council of Europe. The group endorses the proposal by the committees which recommend that the Committee of Ministers should invite Poland to accede to the Council of Europe immediately after legislative elections have been held.

We should have liked to move more quickly towards its accession. But that extra step would have been against the Statute and principles of the Council of Europe. We should have liked to move faster, particularly in recognition of what the Poles have achieved towards regaining their individual and collective freedom. We would thus have paid tribute to their struggle and their determination which have opened the way to freedom.

No one here is contesting the enormous efforts made to reconstruct Poland in all sectors, economic, social, political and institutional. The Poles have initiated great moves to bring to life political and parliamentary democracy. Shortly, the President of the Republic of Poland and the new national assembly will be elected by universal suffrage.

The Socialist Group earnestly hopes that the Polish people will succeed in these enterprises. Nevertheless, despite our wish to see Poland accede quickly, we feel it is essential to meet the legal and statutory conditions our Assembly has laid down for the accession of new members. That is why we support the amended draft opinion.

In fact, it is in compliance with these principles that the Council of Europe finds its strength. It is because it has always been faithful to these values and regulations that our Assembly has acquired wide influence and that it is today the corner-stone of the new European architecture.

So, in due course - and we hope that it will be very soon - the Republic of Poland will be a member of the Council of Europe.

Doubtless this will be an honour for Poland, but I am sure that it will also be an honour for the Council of Europe to welcome a great nation which has overcome the vicissitudes of history.

THE PRESIDENT. - Before I call the next speaker, I remind all members that they have five minutes in which to speak.

I call Mr. Jessel.

Mr. JESSEL (*United Kingdom*). - I congratulate Mr. Masseret on the speech that he made on behalf of the Socialist Group. I am not a socialist - far from it - but I fully agree with the positive spirit in which he spoke and regret that I am unable to say the same about Mrs. Lentz-Cornette, who showed a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for Poland becoming a full member of the Council of Europe. She mentioned it almost as an afterthought at the end of her speech. I hope that the whole Assembly will rise to the level of the great event that Poland's membership of the Council will be, once it has qualified.

I should like to speak in personal terms. I have always tremendously admired Poland's valiant spirit. For many years, as a keen amateur pianist, I have played works by Chopin and have felt inspired by his noble combination of romance, poetry and patriotism. My sister is married to the Polish composer Panufnik, who made his home in England after leaving Poland in the 1950s when he was unable to accept the communist government's interference with his artistic freedom. Incidentally, he returned to Poland last month for the first time in thirty-five years to conduct some of his own works.

Because of that family connection with Poland, in the House of Commons in the 1970s I helped the late Airey Neave with the Katyn Memorial. Airey Neave had been a war hero and was later a Conservative member of parliament who was very close to Mrs Thatcher. He would have been in her Cabinet if he had not been murdered by the IRA in the spring of 1979. Airey Neave was the mainspring behind the idea of a large memorial in London to the 14 000 Polish officers who were murdered in the Katyn forest in 1940. I served as honorary secretary to the Katyn Memorial Committee. Despite enormous difficulties, the memorial was erected in the end. I believe that it meant a lot to the Polish expatriates in Britain, many of whom had fought so bravely to bring about the defeat of the nazis in the second world war. I had the great pleasure of taking our friend and colleague, Mr Wiackowski, to see the Katyn Memorial in London when he was there a few months ago. I share the general expression of sympathy to him about the serious illness of his wife.

The torch of freedom was never extinguished in Poland. As Sir Geoffrey Finsberg said in both his speech and his report, the ideals of freedom and of moral and family values were always kept alive by a mixture of religious faith and patriotism in Poland. Poland was the leader, and it began the movement that other countries followed - the movement for freedom in Eastern and Central Europe in recent years.

Had it been legally and technically possible, I should have welcomed Poland as the first to join our Assembly as a full member. The sooner Poland can become a full member, when it has qualified technically and legally, the happier I shall be. That will be a glorious day not just for Poland but for the Council of Europe.

THE PRESIDENT. - I call Mr Pini.

Mr PINI (*Switzerland*) (Translation). - Madam President, distinguished colleagues, allow me to remind you of the considerations it was my honour to express yesterday to this Assembly during the debate on Romania and my words this morning during this decisive day for the accession of Hungary.

Allow me also to support the conclusion of my colleague who stressed that Poland was the first country in Europe to begin the move towards democratic freedom, the struggle to assert itself in full respect for law, especially in the acquiring of individual freedoms.

Allow me to say that, finally, one great question remains for the Council. In fact, perfection does not exist in the construction of democracy; Mrs. Lalumière reminded us of this yesterday during the inauguration of the International Institute for Democracy. No country can claim that its system is perfect, not even mine, which is about to celebrate 700 years of existence as a confederation, 700 years of freedom and democracy.

And I do not forget that Switzerland, because of its federal system, acceded to the Council of Europe before it acceded to the European Convention on Human Rights since a majority of cantons had not yet given women the vote.

Nor can I forget the other conditions which form part of the history of this magnificent seat of the right of peoples to freedom and democracy.

Nor can I forget the countries which today are the pillars of the Council of Europe.

So, nothing is perfect, there is always room for improvement. Asking Hungary, asking Poland, and even Romania - as I did yesterday regarding its application for special guest status - to provide democratic perfection would be going too far. I repeat that we must offer a hand when the will to construct democracy is obvious. In the light of the amendments tabled, I consider that the Political Affairs Committee, the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries and the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights have found an extremely constructive joint approach.

We recognise that for Poland there is this *questa emergenza*, this will for the construction of democracy and democratic and institutional improvement in the framework of fundamental freedoms.

As a member of parliament, as a person, I consider that the Council of Europe must offer a hand where that will exist. Nothing is perfect, everything can change. Because the will to move in that direction exists, we must help, and waste no time.

We are not a static body. We cannot, as the Council of Europe, wait until perfection knocks at our door. We must assist the development of the will for democracy and freedom to be strengthened through institutional change.

Poland and other countries are experiencing this type of change in their countries and structures. The foundations are there; the plan exists, the roof can be seen; but the building is not yet finished; I hope that it will be soon. It is in this spirit that I endorse the conclusions of the extremely realistic report by Sir Geoffrey Finsberg. Two days ago I said that he was not a prophet, no more than Mr Scares Costa was. And yet, there are not many things to alter in his report. He has seen clearly that Poland is the, first to have suffered for what it wants to become. Mr Sager was indeed right to stress, in an amendment, Poland's suffering and its commitment to move forward on the road to freedom and democracy.

Because of this will we must follow a historical reasoning, not demonstrate generosity; that is not the point. The politician must be in the line of history, not outside it; he must help the history of democracy to progress.

For these reasons, and despite all the reservations which, legally, could still be formulated– but they could also be formulated for other countries, members and non-members of the Council of Europe - because Poland has the will to become a fully democratic country, granting freedom and dignity to the individual, because Poland has made sacrifices, because its people have made sacrifices, during and after the war, I am for its accession and I shall vote for it.

THE PRESIDENT - I call Mrs Francese.

Mrs FRANCESE (*Italy*) (Translation). - Madam President, I think that it is right, at a time when we are preparing to invite the Republic of Poland to become a member of the Council of Europe, to remember that the great shake-up in the East really started in that country.

I also have a thousand memories of the last ten years when, before the advent of perestroika in the Soviet Union, despite the authorities' deafness to any requests for freedom and independence, in Poland an attempt was made to find an original way, admittedly one fraught with dangers and contradictions, of building a pluralist society. At first, events in Poland took place against an international political background characterized by the idea that the status quo in Europe was immutable. East-West relations were such that we all believed and all feared that events in Poland would lead nowhere. As a matter of fact we thought that the outcome was bound to be dramatic and tragic. Today it is different and in Poland the transition to democracy will be much less wearisome.

Of course, it may seem paradoxical that a nation which was the first to blaze a trail to the post-communist era should be the last as elections have not yet taken place. But at such times of transition - this proves to be true everywhere - the old and the new mix inextricably to create bizarre, incongruous and at times also paradoxical situations. It is for this very reason, however, that I think that it is not only right but helpful to take the decision which we are preparing to take here to invite Poland to become a member of the Council of Europe immediately after the free elections that are to take place next spring. In my opinion this is the best way in which we can support the effort being made in that country.

THE PRESIDENT. - I call Mr Karhan.

Mr KARHAN (*Turkey*) (Interpretation) congratulated Sir Geoffrey Finsberg on his report. Poland had been the first of the Central and East European countries to start the democratic process. Free elections had already been held for the Senate and local government and were due for the Lower House in March 1991. Efforts were also under way to introduce a new constitution by March 1991 which would guarantee

fundamental freedoms. A democratic regime could not be perfected by free elections alone but only by generations of effort. He noted the comments in the report on the independence of the Polish judiciary.

He recalled the roots of Western civilization and the key role of the Pole Copernicus in the development of the natural sciences. Poland had been deeply respected in the time of the Ottoman empire and the seat of their ambassador had been maintained during the dissolution of Poland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At that time the Polish ambassador had not been able to respond to the call to approach the Sultan, but now Poland was able to approach the Council of Europe.

THE PRESIDENT. - I call Mrs Baarveld-Schlaman.

Mrs BAARVELD-SCHLAMAN(*Netherlands*) (Translation). - Madam President, I recall clearly that the Political Affairs Committee visited Poland a few weeks ago and that we have greatly disappointed our Polish colleagues. They have told us so. We have tried to explain why most of our colleagues and then the committee as a whole were of the opinion that amendments had to be made to the initial proposal and that some conditions had to be laid down for Poland's accession. I understand the disappointment of our Polish colleagues and their government. But since Poland has assured us several times that it did not want to be treated exceptionally with regard to accession, I think that we were right to set some conditions.

What I tried to explain in Warsaw - and I think it needs repeating - is that we have absolutely no intention, and I include myself in this, of adopting an anti-Polish stance. Why would I want to do that? I shall rejoice on the day Poland can accede to the Council of Europe. And I am quite sure that it is not very far off. What I said at the time - and I repeat it - is that a member of this Assembly must be sure that the fundamental principles which are the basis of the Council of Europe are met and I cannot accept further debate on that issue. The fundamental concepts of democracy and human rights must be protected when a country expresses the wish to accede to the Council of Europe. The countries which express that wish must meet the conditions to accede in a proper manner. That is why I also find it good that the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights has now got time to check again concepts other than exclusively political ones.

I think that in the near future the conditions will be met. These conditions will - I hope - be adopted shortly when we vote. And then, very soon, we shall be able to welcome Poland here and elsewhere as a full member of this Assembly.

Allow me, Madam President, to offer some further thoughts to my Polish colleagues, I hope that in Poland the separation between the Church and the State will continue and that, for example, religious education will be conducted in such a way in schools that anyone who does not wish to follow it will be truly free to refuse.

My second thought concerns the recognition of and respect for women's rights and their enshrinement in legislation. In conclusion, my last thought: May Poland become a full member of this Assembly as soon as possible and the members of its parliamentary delegation our trusted colleagues.

THE PRESIDENT. - I call Mr Pontillon.

Mr PONTILLON(*France*) (Translation). Madam President, distinguished colleagues, our great man Jaurès said that it was by flowing down to the sea that the river is faithful to its source. It is by moving towards the joint construction of a Europe which is quite simply Europe, without having to be described as Western, Central, Eastern, neutral or free-trade, that Europe will be faithful to its history.

The process has begun now. Personally, I find it still tentative, perhaps even too hesitant' Doubtless - who could contest it in this Chamber - this construction is conceivable only if Europe is based on representative democratic institutions elected by freely expressed universal suffrage.

However, strict compliance with texts does not exclude daring and imagination. So, last year, we were able to make a bold innovation by instituting the special guest status, responding to the democratic aspirations which were dawning in Eastern Europe. I even think that our attitude then has contributed to speeding up the

reforms we so welcome today.

Conversely, I am afraid that our literal interpretation of the electoral calendar in Poland may be perceived as an over-dilatory attitude. Yesterday, we outpaced history, today, let us not miss the rendezvous that we ourselves have sought and prepared.

In fact, the problem is to realize what our true reference is. I believe it is not an electoral calendar which is the chief requirement; it is a political will which is at issue. That is, faithfulness to the Statute and the logic of its Article 5 which specifies that candidates must be "deemed to be able and willing to fulfil the provisions of Article 3. Is there anyone in this Assembly who could claim that Poland does not already meet this requirement?

In the climate of uncertainty still surrounding Central and Eastern Europe, we must give every chance and brook no delays to the aspiration to democracy and institutional stability. Belonging to the Council of Europe would be the obvious sign. In this Chamber, we are not provincial notaries administering with the least effort a legacy without the least ambition.

Must I add, finally, for the French, that we must not miss again our rendezvous with the great country of Poland. Let us not wait until the details of what Jean-Jacques Rousseau called a "plan to govern Poland" are implemented. Let us welcome Poland into the European family without delay. We shall thus be contributing to the progress of democracy there and all enriching ourselves by its major contribution.

I shall therefore vote for Sir Geoffrey's proposal with a certain resignation, for lack of being able to go faster and further.

THE PRESIDENT. - I call Mr Rowe.

Mr ROWE(*United Kingdom*). - The cinema, like the novel, has lasted so long because it allows us to live vicariously - to thrill to the adventures of others who perform feats of which we would be incapable. I have certainly felt that thrill as I have listened to our friends from Eastern Europe describing how they have endured half a lifetime of persecution, now to emerge into the bright sunlight of hope restored. Their escape is excitement enough for one evening at the cinema of real life, but there is, of course, the second half of the performance to follow: the tremendous efforts they now have to make to ensure that they do not fall back into the jaws of the monster from which they have just escaped. At this most vulnerable of moments, they are entitled to hope for a steadying arm from their friends. Last night at the opening meeting of the new International Institute for Democracy, one of our friends from Czechoslovakia told us that their people's parties are now faced with a real crisis of identity. Hitherto they have been able to define themselves in terms of who they are not; now they have to find a positive definition.

These challenges, which face all our new friends from the East, including the Poles, would be hard enough to overcome in times of prosperity. What are our friends to do when they are being battered by economic storms as severe as any in recent memory? We heard from Professor Wiackowski of the dreadful legacy inherited from the discredited communist regime. He told us just how large a proportion of Poland's budget goes in servicing the debts that it has inherited from its oppressors. Such debts enervate even the healthiest and most robust of economies. I have just returned from the USA where, for the first time, I found the Americans genuinely anxious about their future. No less than 35% of the federal budget goes just to service the interest on their foreign debt. If debt can bring a huge economy like theirs almost to its knees, what will it do to a country such as Poland?

The West has made a modest start to help. The United Kingdom, for example, has not been idle. In June last year, we established a know-how fund of 25 million pounds to help pay for expertise in establishing democracy and a free-market economy. That sum has since been doubled. A further 15 million has since been provided to help with an agricultural project. What is more, Britain is playing a full part in the European Communities' programme of assistance, whether the 100 million ecus of free food or the 300 million ecus package for Poland and Hungary, covering such areas as agricultural reform, environmental

protection and manpower training. There is also the one thousand million dollars stabilisation fund for Poland to back the liberalisation of the foreign exchange regime, to which we have contributed a further 100 million dollars. A start has certainly been made.

In my last moments I wish to raise two other matters. The first is prompted by a meeting in the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg last Friday when a number of us spoke to the young politicians gathered for a colloquy. The topic was the environment, and it ended depressingly. When the floor was given to the delegates from Eastern Europe, they instantly began to exchange accusations about which country was most polluting its neighbours. I understood their frustration only too well, but I could not help reflecting on the perversity of human beings who, after ridding themselves of the most tyrannical form of government imaginable, should within months seek to vent their spleen on friends with whom they had suffered and from whom each had at some stage drawn strength and courage for the fight. If their whole gallant endeavour is not to founder on rocks of mutual hostility, practical work must be started now to defuse the situation and to create cooperation instead of anger. Otherwise, as the economic situation grows temporarily bleaker, cynical politicians will exploit the disappointed impatience of the young and distract them from the real priorities by turning them against their neighbours.

I understand that over the years there has been, in this Council, a recurring suggestion that the great rivers of Europe should each be subjected to some form of international control. I believe that it has always been blocked by one country or another fearful of losing sovereignty. Has not the time come to try again? Perhaps the Vistula or the Oder could act as a prototype. If the countries through which they pass could establish joint committees to work out ways of restoring them to cleanliness, it would be a victory not only for the whole world, but would show the whole of Europe that the inhabitants of our common home have more interest in mending its roof than in throwing stones through their neighbours' windows.

My other idea is simple. I have been told that a major cost to our newly liberated friends is that of accommodation in the cities they need to visit to meet the experts whose assistance they require. Why does not each of the older democracies in Europe establish in its capital a hostel where visitors could not only stay free or for minimum cost, but could study and meet the people they want to meet? I believe that in London, at least, such a centre could be financed and supported in part by the Polish community itself. They might welcome the chance to do something so manifestly useful and yet so distinctively Polish. I shall certainly go home to make enquiries, and I hope that others will do the same.

[...]

Mr SOLE-TURA(*Spain*) (Interpretation) felt that the legal point about what was being decided had been lost in debate. The decision to be taken was whether to admit Poland to membership on that very day. However, if the committee's proposals were accepted, that decision would have no concrete effect until free elections in Poland were held.

THE PRESIDENT. - Does the Chairman of the Committee on Relations with European Non-Member Countries wish to speak?...

I call Mr Sager.

Mr SAGER(*Switzerland*) (Translation). –

Madam President, I should like to underscore what my colleague Mr Solé-Tura has said and I should like to request that this point be clearly recorded in the official report of this sitting: we are asking the Committee of Ministers to admit Poland after the holding of elections, which is when the decision would become effective.

I should like here very briefly to deal with some of the reservations that have been expressed. The overwhelming majority of experts on Eastern Europe have reached the conclusion that the developments in Poland are irreversible, and that is the main reason for our being able to submit this proposal today. It is no

business of ours whether the Polish President is given broad or very narrow powers in the future, since we have one member country - France - where the President has wide-ranging powers, and another, the Federal Republic of Germany, whose President has more limited powers. Nor is it our business whether the electoral law provides for a majority system or a proportional system. One of our member countries, the United Kingdom, has a majority system, while another, Switzerland, uses proportional representation. These are issues which the Poles have to resolve independently, as a sovereign nation.

What interests us are the conditions set by the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights. We have been assured by the Polish authorities that Poland will ratify the Convention as soon as it becomes a member. Unfortunately, we have not yet opened the Convention to non-member states. We would be doing a great service to the cause of human rights if non-member states were also allowed to ratify this Convention, since its influence would then extend beyond Europe, beyond the member states, and that would be a very positive development.

The current President of Poland, Mr Jaruzelski, has stepped down and cannot return to office after his resignation. He will not be a candidate in the presidential elections to be organised later this year. If he were to put his name forward, he would almost certainly be beaten.

I believe, therefore, that we have every reason to admit Poland on this basis. When we say that admission will become effective only after free elections have been held, I should like to point out that it is not free elections which are the condition, but that which underlies them, namely political pluralism. And the Poles have provided sufficient proof that such pluralism exists in Poland.

We have laid down the condition of "free elections" because Polish legislation is to be brought up to Council of Europe standard in time for the elections. That is the reason for this condition, which was adopted as part of a compromise arrangement and which will be put before you when we discuss the amendments.

Thank you.

[...]

THE PRESIDENT. - I call the Vice Chairman of the Political Affairs Committee.

Mr MARTINEZ (Spain). - The remarks of a number of our colleagues, including Mr Solé-Tura and Mr Sager, have made it easier for me to say what I want to say.

It should be clear that we are making a political decision of the utmost importance, and one which has broad practical implications. We are recommending the acceptance of Poland as a full member of the Council of Europe. That is the essential aspect of the decision, even if it gives rise to a number of other important issues.

That political gesture should be regarded principally as a recognition by the Assembly of what the Polish people have achieved on their way to democracy. But it is more than that. I should like the Polish representatives to realise that our decision also reflects our recognition of a feature that has marked the whole of Poland's history - resistance, in the name of national dignity and national identity, and for the sake of freedom. Poland has resisted several different dictatorial and imperial powers. Our decision also reflects our recognition that that feature of Polish history has made a significant contribution to the European identity and personality, as well as to European history. I illustrate that point by particular reference to the Warsaw resistance - not least the ghetto resistance - which also played its part in fashioning Europe's history and identity.

We are also recognising Poland's example in making a stand and solving problems with a combination of firmness and flexibility, and in finding solutions to very complicated problems.

In that respect, Poland's example is of tremendous importance to all the other countries located in the same

part of our continent.

We have decided that we want Poland to be represented here but that we intend to stick to the principles of the Council of Europe. We shall not sacrifice principles that are essential to the identity of the Council of Europe. Our decision also proclaims the mutual understanding between Poland and the Council of Europe. Poland needs the European dimension as it regains its freedom and democratic values; conversely, the Council of Europe needs Poland if it is to be more genuinely European and if it is to merit its name.

I want to pay tribute to Sir Geoffrey Finsberg for all his efforts and for not only producing a good report but for his readiness to accept arguments put by colleagues on other committees - to whom I also pay tribute. I believe that we have found an acceptable compromise. I hope that that happy solution will not be regarded as exceptional but as a standard that will apply in any similar future case.

THE PRESIDENT. - The debate is closed.

The Political Affairs Committee has presented, in Document 6289, a draft opinion which reads as follows:

- " 1. The Assembly has received from the Committee of Ministers a request for an opinion on the accession of Poland to the Council of Europe (Doc. 6188), in pursuance of Statutory Resolution (51) 30 A adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1951.*
- 2. It recognises that Poland set an example to all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe by organising parliamentary elections on 4 June 1989, which, although completely free only for the Senate, soon led to the formation of the region's first government based on democratic legitimacy.*
- 3. The Assembly appreciates the vigorous contribution made by Poland to the work of the Council of Europe, both at parliamentary level since being granted special guest status on 8 June 1989, and at intergovernmental level since acceding to several European conventions, including the European Cultural Convention, signed on 16 November 1989.*
- 4. It also notes that the local and municipal elections organised on 25 May 1990 were pronounced free and fair by the observer delegation from the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and that the first completely free parliamentary elections are likely to be called in March 1991.*
- 5. The Assembly considers that Poland is able and willing:*
- i. to fulfil the provisions of Article 3 of the Statute, which stipulates that ' every member of the Council of Europe must accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms';*
 - ii. to collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council of Europe as specified in Chapter I of the Statute of the Council of Europe, thereby fulfilling the conditions for accession to the Council of Europe as laid down in Article 4 of the Statute.*
- 6. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers, at its next meeting:*
- i. invite the Republic of Poland to become a member of the Council of Europe immediately following free general elections in that country;*
 - ii. attribute twelve seats to Poland in the Parliamentary Assembly."*