

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

Caption: On 2 October 1990, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe approves Hungary's accession to the Council of Europe.

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

Mr. SCHIEDER(*Austria*) (Translation). — Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, the Parliamentary Assembly must express an opinion on Hungary's accession. The proposal of the Political Affairs Committee is clear, unambiguous and was unanimously adopted by the committee: the Republic of Hungary ought to be invited to become a member of the Council of Europe.

I do not need to read out my extensive report; you have the written version in front of you. It explains in detail that Hungary fulfils all the conditions for admission to the Council of Europe in the requisite fields such as its constitution, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, that it has an active parliament, all members of which were elected following a universal, free and secret ballot and that Hungary is also prepared to sign the European Convention on Human Rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to make four further comments.

First, Hungary will be the first state from the former Eastern bloc to belong to the forum of European democracies. After the introduction of special guest status for East European countries, the admission of the first one of them as a full member is another clear sign of the great transformation in Europe and that the Council of Europe is ready to adapt accordingly.

Hungary's admission - providing, of course, that you and the Committee of Ministers so s decide - is a matter for the Council of Europe. It is thanks to the Hungarian people and to the individuals and institutions that smoothed the way to democracy in Hungary, who fought for it and who have taken this path, that Hungary can be admitted, that the necessary conditions for this were created.

When we at this time congratulate all the Hungarians who have contributed to this development, let us also remember all those who laid down their lives for freedom and democracy.

Secondly, I would like to say that it goes without saying that, on entry, Hungary will become a member of the Council of Europe with all the rights and duties that this entails. I stress this to both the Hungarian members of parliament and all of us here in the Parliamentary Assembly.

By this I mean, on the one hand, that there is no political honeymoon period for a new member, that it is not a question of once they are in, they are in and that is the end of it. Every member state has to accept that its policy, its legislative bills, the way in which it treats minorities, the environment, nature and monuments, whether there is renewed nationalism in the country, etc., even the composition of its delegation to the Assembly will be constantly scrutinised, critically examined and discussed here.

On the other hand, there is no waiting period or apprenticeship in the Council of Europe, no unwritten law, as there is on many other institutions, that the newcomer had better just listen at the beginning and wait for a while before making any critical remarks. We welcome Hungary's active participation from its first day of membership. Its opinion as a new member, its contributions, and its criticism will receive as much attention and esteem as that of all the other members.

Thirdly, I must thank all the Hungarian authorities, especially the Hungarian guest delegation to the Assembly, who were frank and honest and readily provided me with documentation.

Fourthly and lastly, Mr. President, Hungary will not have a very large delegation at the Council of Europe. As an Austrian, who comes from a country which has slightly fewer inhabitants than Hungary, I know how important it is for a small country to find itself back in Europe. At a time of standardisation and harmonisation it is much harder for small states to preserve their identity. That is why the little countries of Europe particularly appreciate it that, at the Council of Europe, cultivation of the common heritage goes hand in hand with respect for differences and diversity. For the Council of Europe, the unity of Europe does not mean uniformity, but unity in diversity.

The great Hungarian poet, no, the great European poet Endre Ady once wrote in a poem that one can protect oneself only if one can speak out. And he adds two lines to this: "Would that I could be heard and seen, would that I could be heard and seen!"

We are pleased to hear and see Hungary in the Council of Europe. As Rapporteur, I recommend unreservedly that the Republic of Hungary be admitted to the Council of Europe.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - I thank the Rapporteur for his interesting report and for keeping to his time-limit.

I call Mrs Willoch, Rapporteur for opinion of the Committee on Relations with European Non Member Countries.

Mrs WILLOCH (Norway). - The development in Eastern and Central Europe has been dramatic. The word "historic" has been repeated again and again these past two years without becoming inflated, over used or worn. Today it applies again. This is a historic event. Hungary will be recommended as a full member. It is the first of the former totalitarian communist states ruled by the communist empire to reach this goal. To the Hungarians and to us it is a milestone.

The Council of Europe has as its basic conditions for membership a working democracy, individual freedom and full respect for human rights. The Council of Europe's identity and trademark lies in its uncompromising loyalty to these values, loyalty that is not satisfied only with goodwill, promises and expressed intentions, but demands established, factual and secured rights. If the Council of Europe is to keep its authority and influence over the development, establishment and maintenance of these rights throughout Europe it cannot compromise or accept diluted or lowered standards.

The future of the Council, both in itself and as a platform for the new European assembly, lies in its continued respect for these demands, both as a kind of birthright and as a justification of its existence. I am emphasising this because there might be a temptation to make as many CSCE countries full members as soon as possible, or before, by making a positive development a qualification in itself.

If we do not stick to these valuable traditions of defending human rights and full democracy, we might gradually become yet another superfluous, but nice forum for debate, considered by our fellow parliamentarians at home to be a good excuse for long and enjoyable travels and asparagus meals. With the new Eastern and Central European members, it will also be necessary to look at the Council's future role in European politics. We must consider whether we should put more emphasis on the role as a decision maker than on a counselling one, as the name of our forum implies.

I am quite new to my role as a co Rapporteur. I pay tribute to our distinguished colleague, Mr. Wilkinson, who represented the committee in the group of three rapporteurs. He has, together with them, taken part in the preparations of the excellent and thorough report of Mr. Peter Schieder, whom I also compliment. I have, in addition to a visit with a Norwegian parliamentary group, had the pleasure of being an observer to the Hungarian elections this spring, and I took part in the Council's economic conference in Budapest last May. On both occasions, I was deeply impressed by the progress that has been made in Hungary and the seriousness, eagerness and earnestness in their work for building and rebuilding a truly democratic state with secured legal rights and established individual human rights.

Our attitude towards our possible new members might easily become a little condescending - a teacher-pupil attitude. We have had our democratic systems for so long, we take them for granted, and often as a matter of course. We might therefore develop some kind of blindness and consider all our different systems of elections and parliaments to be almost perfect. We are used to them, and the proof of this quality is, of course, that they elected us.

Being a Conservative I naturally see the advantages of keeping the traditions that have proved worth while, but that does not mean that we should ignore the need for improvements and re-evaluations of our systems to see whether they comply with the democratic ideals. Having had the opportunity to study the Hungarian

election system, which is rather complicated, and also the country's new constitution, I am truly impressed by the high democratic standards. They might be the teachers, not the pupils, to many other countries. Of course, they have the advantage of starting almost from scratch, but their systems are good reading to those of us that might have become a bit too comfortable or complacent with our old systems. My compliments to the Hungarians for what they have so admirably achieved and accomplished.

I am of a generation that does not remember the war, but has as its first deep impression of foreign events the uprising in Hungary in 1956. We had no television, so we listened to the radio and watched the tanks and the Molotov cocktails in the Budapest streets in black and white news-reels in the local cinema. We were scared by the brutal evilness in what happened. We admired the almost foolish bravery of the resistance. We shared their desperation and anger. It made us understand what the denial of freedom and national self determination means to a people. I still remember the sorrow in the eyes of our local doctor, a Hungarian refugee from 1948, who had taught his Norwegian-born children his mother tongue in the hope of returning to a free country. We watched his hopes die. I think that all of us from the free Europe who can remember this shared his sorrow.

Today is different. It has taken a long time, it has taken determination, courage and suffering, and I feel both humble and thankful to stand here today. I am humble because we owe so much to others - to the Hungarians themselves but also to the peoples of the other countries like Poland and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, which are part of this process. I feel sure that they will soon follow Hungary as full members. We owe a special debt to the glasnost process led by Mr. Gorbachev. We also honour the Hungarians for being the first to open the Iron Curtain and thus also becoming a part of what is happening in Germany tomorrow.

The Committee on Relations with European Non Member Countries fully supports the report presented by Mr. Schieder. Mr. Forni, on behalf of the committee, has tabled one amendment, but its intention is only to strengthen what we say. We support the report also in the hope that it is a first step on a road that will finally make our committee superfluous. The Hungarians have a beautiful expression for welcome. It really means, "God brought you here". I hope that our Hungarian colleagues will forgive my pronunciation when I say "Isten hozott" - Welcome.

[...]

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). —

[...]

I call Mrs GJORV, the first person down to speak in the general debate, who will be taking the floor on behalf of the whole Socialist Group.

Mrs GJORV (Norway). — On behalf of the Socialist Group, I would like to compliment our colleague Mr Schieder on a very comprehensive and interesting report.

I am afraid of using fine words and superlatives, as they are devalued these days and easily lose their power, but I think that the present situation calls for fine words. The decision on the accession of Hungary as a full member of the Council of Europe is a historic event.

Hungary is the first Warsaw Pact country that, on its own merits, has deserved to take the big step and pass the high threshold from "special guest status" bench to the "full member" bench. The Socialist Group welcomes Hungary as a full member, and we would also like to express our admiration for how seriously Hungary has worked to fulfil the preconditions that we must and will set for acceptance into the membership of the Council of Europe. The report documents and expresses the view that this is the case for Hungary. I think that the developments in Hungary should be an example of the process that other countries with special guest status must go through to become full members.

The Socialist Group also takes this opportunity to express its gratitude for the tearing down of the Wall. We would like to direct our thanks to Hungary, as it was Hungary that made the first hole. The law of nature, both for water and human beings, is that no wall can resist a strong pressure once a hole has been created. The increasing stream makes the hole bigger until the whole dam is swept away.

German unification is one of the first results of the breaking down of the Wall, and a new Europe will follow.

Hungary comes to the Council of Europe to participate in a free and democratic Europe - and, perhaps, also to learn. However, we have a great deal to learn from Hungary. I pay tribute to the intelligentsia and artists who managed to keep the dreams of freedom alive during the time of oppression. I hope that a country with such a strong intelligentsia can inspire the whole of Europe. A free Europe needs Hungary.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - I call Mr Scovacicchi.

Mr SCOVACRICCHI (*Italy*) (Translation). Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I feel moved when making this modest and very brief statement because, like our Austrian colleagues, I had first hand experience of the suffering of those days. We have said that Hungary is the first East European country to apply for membership of the Council of Europe, but for anyone who is familiar with its long, sad history and above all for anyone who knows about the present situation, membership is merely formal recognition of the democratic and free spirit to which it has always borne such abundant witness.

I completely agree with Mr Schieder who, as an Austrian, knows the situation in Hungary better than many other people and who has presented a report which is extremely sound in every respect. For who has demonstrated greater faith in human rights - which we rightly make the precondition of admission to the Council of Europe - than Hungary?

If it is true that, as Goethe said, only he who knows how to win freedom for himself day after day deserves freedom, then Hungary and, in my view, Poland - which we will be discussing this afternoon and which, I have the feeling, will very soon be entering this Chamber - have a more than ample claim to it.

Even after the revolution failed, what could quell the ardour expressed on that first of November when Imre Nagy proclaimed neutrality and thereby provoked the Soviet reaction which cost thirty thousand lives? Hungary, by patiently, stubbornly fostering an economic and political reform movement within the country, created the conditions for a gentle, painless transition to democracy. By cutting through the barbed wire with Austria, it prepared for the demolition of the Berlin Wall.

As I say, it has also been most sorely tried and it would be an insult to your intelligence if I were to dwell on the subject. Its history, like that of Poland and a little like that of Italy, is a history of wounds, dismemberment and oppression. After the revolution of which, as I said, I had first hand experience, I heard the congregation in St Stephen's church standing to sing the national anthem after mass. Its words are: "O Lord, stretch out Thy hand to protect Thy people, because it has expiated the past and the future."

It is hard to hold back the tears, but in spite of its most deceptive experience - that of communism - its ethnic, linguistic, religious, moral and typically European identity has remained unchanged. And now it has turned to the Europe which it defended and honoured through the centuries, from which it was separated and whose help it entreated in its martyrdom.

We all heard the cry of "Budapest calling Europe" that went out from Sandor Brody Street, the site of the radio station. We heard these words uttered in the death pangs of one of the noblest revolutions in history. But Europe was idling in comfort and, like its great ally, was distracted by Suez.

For me, today's event is history's revenge. Up until now, the Council of Europe has of necessity been a Western organization, but today it has opened up to span a wider, more natural area. We are sure that, although Hungary has only just peeped out at the West, it will perhaps supply a more conscious impetus

towards accomplishing the European unity which, according to Article 1 of our Statute, is our aim and, I would almost say, the main reason of our existence.

It is not enough just to welcome it to the Council of Europe. I would say that we are carrying out a fitting act which, in my opinion, heralds the legitimate prospect of fuller integration. I am thinking of the European Community to which it will not be able to remain a stranger for long. But we will have to press our governments to ensure that the liberty it has won back results in well-being. I would say that this question is not unrelated to the Gulf crisis.

We Europeans have a duty to help all the states which have rid themselves of dictatorships, to help them not to lose faith in this freedom, as I would not like the low electoral turnout the other day in Hungary to be a sign of tiredness or lack of confidence in institutions that the Hungarians might consider to be irreversible, because there is no going back, but incapable of standing the historic test, because the transition to a market economy has a terribly high price.

I conclude, Mr. President, by welcoming the noble Hungarian nation with all my heart on behalf of the Italian delegation.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - You have slightly exceeded the time allotted to you, but the warmth of your words made up for their length.

I call Mr. Reddemann.

Mr. REDDEMANN (*Federal Republic of Germany*) (Translation). - Mr. President, the previous speaker said how moved he was when he heard the Hungarian national anthem in St Stephan's in Budapest. I admit to being equally moved when, during that same night of 4 November 1956, on the border between Austria and Hungary, I heard the last free radio station in Hungary playing the national anthem. It then broke off abruptly, as if it were a sign that Hungarian freedom had come to an end.

I can still remember those notes. I remembered them above all last year when we granted Hungary special guest status at the Council of Europe. We were all convinced that Hungary had an opportunity to introduce democracy without delay, to win back freedom for its own country and to return to Europe.

A few days later, we witnessed Hungary's opening of the border to Austria and saw the Austrian and Hungarian Foreign Ministers cutting through the barbed wire together. With this act, they set far more in motion than we at first supposed.

We watched, as many people, especially from the GDR, which will cease to exist tomorrow, sought the route via Hungary. They got stuck in camps for weeks, because Hungary suddenly found itself in a terrible predicament. On the one hand, Hungary had a commitment to the Government of the GDR to return all refugees to that country. On the other hand, in an act of political foresight, Hungary had already undertaken here in Strasbourg to accept the European Convention on Human Rights. This convention naturally gives all human beings the right to flee from the country they have previously been living in.

When the then Hungarian Prime Minister assured the German Federal Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, on 29 August last year at Castle Gymnich, near Bonn, that his Government would open the borders of his country, this was not only a happy moment for the few people in the know, it was an unambiguous declaration by Hungary of its belief in Europe, European values and human rights.

I believe that what was set in motion at that moment is, alone, reason enough to say that this country, which took such a decision in a difficult situation, belongs as naturally in the Council of Europe as all other states which have managed to shake off a dictatorship.

I had the honour of monitoring the elections in Hungary as head of our Assembly's observer delegation. I must admit that I was impressed with the lack of fuss surrounding preparations for these first free elections,

that it was regarded as perfectly normal that parties would be able to make their preparations for the elections.

For this reason, Mr President, personally and on behalf of the German delegation and my Christian Democrat friends, I would like to bid a hearty welcome to Hungary, which has now established itself as a democratic state in Europe.

Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - Thank you for being brief, Mr Reddemann.

I call Mr Pini.

Mr PINI (*Switzerland*) (Translation). — Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me on this occasion to speak in my mother tongue, to enable me to express the same deep emotions as those experienced by my colleague Mr. Scovacricchi with regard to the memory of 1956.

I was then twenty and was a mountain infantryman attending the training college for recruits in Bellinzona. We should have finished our military service in November, but my lieutenant informed us that Hungary had been invaded and that we would therefore have to remain in the Swiss army for a few more months. I also remember the next year, that is to say 1957, when some young students stood in front of Berne Cathedral with lighted candles, together with many Hungarians - men, women and children - who were being sheltered en masse by my country and who today make up the Swiss generation of the Hungary of 1956. Many children of those Hungarian families who had to leave their country after the Russian invasion of Budapest are today citizens of my country.

You can therefore imagine that I, too, have reasons to feel stirred and moved by this memory going back more than thirty years. At the present time, our gaze roams from Hungary and Poland to Romania and finally to the Soviet Union which practically triggered off this change. Yesterday, let us not forget, it was noted - as a Swiss person I must say this - that, when all is said and done, these countries owe something to President Gorbachev's historic incentive and that they therefore owe their return or their opportunity of returning to a free Europe to him.

It must be said, and this goes for Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, that, without Gorbachev's Soviet Union, we would probably not be able to give our joyful backing to these countries' return to democracy. I must say this, as we must render unto Caesar what is Caesar's.

I would like to add, in particular in connection with what Mr Jansson said, that all these countries will have to survive the same winter, the winter of economic depression.

Mr Jansson stated that democracy can assert itself more easily in the context of economic vigour, but he continued that there is our, namely Switzerland's, example. His statement does indeed reflect reality, because Switzerland was the democracy of the poor. For a long time it was a mountain farmers' democracy, in other words a rural democracy, up until the beginning of the eighteenth century or even later. We had to wait until the beginning of the twentieth century before the Swiss Confederation achieved a decent economic standard. So Mr Jansson's example is a good one.

The danger or snare for these countries as far as their return to democracy and freedom is concerned, is economic depression and the lack of a will to overcome the terrible gnawing misery of such a depression. It is like a deadly rat which gobbles up the backbone of society's determination to follow the course we would like the country to take.

That is why after the applause, excitement, embraces and good wishes, Western Europe, with its strong democracies and economies, will have to see to it that in these culturally rich East European countries, from Moscow to Budapest, from east to west, from north to south, the economies do not collapse. In returning to

freedom and democracy, these countries meet not only our embrace and an infusion of democracy from all over Europe, but also this danger.

In this connection, the West should without further ado applaud the return of these countries to democracy and, in particular, we should wish the Magyar people and the Hungarian state well, while at the same time remaining vigilant. Beware of the savage dog and the lion's maw, because malice and ill fortune can crop up when, as Camus said, rats bearing the plague come to die in a free city.

Beware! Camus' plague-bringing rats represented poverty and the economic downfall of our European continent. They led to fascism, National Socialism and dictatorship, and all this was the opposite of the free and democratic life established in Europe.

In conclusion, it would seem that democratic Europe's main task vis-à-vis Eastern Europe will be economic support for the new course of its civil society.

[...]

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - I now call Mr Balgavy, one of our special guests, authorised to speak in accordance with Rule 55a of the Rules of Procedure.

Mr BALGAVY (*special guest from the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic*). - Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I begin by congratulating the three rapporteurs on their excellent reports.

I come from Slovakia. We Slovaks had a long and common history with the Magyars in a common house in the Hungarian kingdom. For centuries it was a good house because both our nations evolved within it, keeping their own national identities, languages and culture. It was only in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century that the governments of our common state and the Slovak and Hungarian intellectuals failed to solve the problems that were connected with a romantic form of nationalism and to oppose the intensive policy of Magyarisation.

The result was the First World War and the Trianon Treaty. A few days ago, a fellow Hungarian parliamentarian said that the Trianon Treaty had cut the arms and legs off the Hungarian people when many of them were left outside the border of the newly created Hungarian republic. We can understand that feeling because the same thing happened to hundreds of thousands of Slovaks. That is why we fully understand and support the commitment of the Hungarian parliamentarians who are here to safeguard democracy and especially the rights of minorities. I know that both now and in the future we shall cooperate closely in the Council of Europe and that we shall learn from each other - as we used to do for centuries.

Dear Hungarian friends, you are the first of the former Eastern bloc countries to join the Council of Europe. On behalf of the whole Czechoslovak delegation here, may I say how happy we are about that. We congratulate you most cordially.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation). - I call Mr Eisma, who will probably be the last speaker in this debate.

Mr EISMA (*Netherlands*) (Translation). - Mr President, as Hungary is the first country from Central and Eastern Europe to join the Council of Europe, this accession is of great significance. I would like to compliment Mr Schieder on his report. It is most instructive and can be used by other organs. Membership of the Council of Europe enables the Hungarians to join with the countries of Western Europe in their endeavours to improve human rights and our common socio cultural heritage. Furthermore, this accession will enable progress to be made towards the economic changes that are needed and a cleaner environment.

In this context, I hope that Hungary's membership of the Council of Europe will facilitate its accession to the European Community. The process of deepening the European Community ought to be completed rapidly so that it can be widened to include the member states of the Council of Europe. Today we are deciding on

Hungary's membership which will be followed soon, I hope, by that of Poland. When the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe have followed suit (and I hope that today we will express a favourable opinion on the granting of special guest status to Romania in January as an intermediate stage) we will have established the framework for a parliamentary forum of the CSCE. I would be pleased if we did.

We welcome the parliamentary developments furthering democracy in Hungary. All the same, I am surprised by the relatively low turn-out at the elections. This applies not only to Hungary, but to some other countries of Central Europe as well. I would like to know the reasons for it and I hope that we will be able to join forces with the Hungarians (who are still special guests, but who will soon be colleagues and full members) in order to seek solutions. It is not that everybody goes to vote in elections in Council of Europe member states but, as these were the first free elections, I think that we could have expected a more massive turn-out. Let us hope that the local elections next November will show an improvement.

I do not wish to repeat the favourable opinions and reactions expressed by my colleagues. Furthermore, in view of the speaking time allotted to me, you, Mr President, would not allow me to do so. That is why I would like to conclude by expressing my joy in being able to co operate in the near future with seven Hungarian colleagues and their Substitutes in this Assembly.

[...]

THE PRESIDENT (Translation).

[...]

The debate is closed.

The Political Affairs Committee has presented, in Document 6288, a draft opinion in reply to the request from the Committee of Ministers, which reads as follows:

"1. The Assembly has received from the Committee of Ministers a request for an opinion on the accession of Hungary to the Council of Europe (Doc. 6154), in pursuance of Statutory Resolution (51) 30 A adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 3 May 1951.

2. It recognizes the transformation in Hungary, especially the development of parliamentary democracy, illustrated in particular by constitutional provision for the separation of powers, a democratically elected parliament following a universal, free and secret ballot, observed by an ad hoc committee of our Assembly, and by the organization of local elections on 30 September.

3. The Assembly notes the readiness of Hungary to guarantee the principle of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, which is demonstrated in particular by the new legislation already in force and in Hungary's firm intention to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights.

4. It expresses its appreciation for the co-operation of the Hungarian special guest delegation in the work of the Assembly and the hospitality offered by Hungary to several Assembly committee meetings as well as to the Conference on Economic Reform in Central and Eastern Europe: a challenge for all Europe (May 1990) and that foreseen for May 1991 on Parliamentarians and NGOs: politics and citizens.

5. It also welcomes the fact that Hungary has signed the following European conventions drawn up in the Council of Europe:

i. European Cultural Convention;

ii. European Convention on Information on Foreign Law;

iii. Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Information on Foreign Law;

- iv. *Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats;*
- v. *European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches;*
- vi. *Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe;*
- vii. *European Convention on Transfrontier Television,*

And appreciates the declarations made before the organs of the Council of Europe by former Prime Minister Nemeth and former Foreign Minister Horn and the commitment to Europe expressed by Prime Minister Antall when introducing his government's programme in May 1990.

6. The Assembly considers that Hungary 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.*

7. The Assembly welcomes the fact that with the accession of Hungary to the Council of Europe the first and certainly not the last of the states of the former Eastern bloc is joining this forum of European democracies, a fact which illustrates and underlines the great transformation in Europe.

8. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers at its next meeting:

- i. invite the Republic of Hungary to become a member of the Council of Europe forthwith;*
- ii. attribute Hungary seven seats in the Parliamentary Assembly."*

The draft opinion contained in Document 6288 is adopted unanimously.

It will be published as Opinion No. 153.

Thank you, dear colleagues, for this historic vote. It honours Hungary, it does credit to the Assembly. Indeed, could there be a better way of greeting the arrival in our midst a few minutes ago of the Prime Minister of Hungary, which will become the twenty-fourth member of the Council of Europe, the twenty-third being Finland.

It is our way of seeing to it that, after more than one thousand years, the Ugro-Finnish branch is reconstituted here under the Council of Europe flag.

The sitting is suspended.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m. with Mr Bjorck, President of the Assembly, in the Chair.)

[...]

5. Statement by Mr Jozsef Antall, Prime Minister of Hungary

THE PRESIDENT. — It is now my pleasure to invite Mr Jozsef Antall, Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, to address the Assembly.

Mr Antall has kindly agreed to answer questions from the floor after making his statement.

Mr Prime Minister, I warmly welcome you as head of government of the Republic of Hungary.

Your country is destined soon to become the first - but certainly not the last - of the states of the former Eastern bloc to join the Council of Europe, our forum of European democracies.

When you took office, you paid generous tribute to your predecessor, Mr Nemeth, who addressed us last January, and to his Foreign Minister, Mr Horn. Those two leading reformers paved the way towards pluralism and national independence from inside the system. They did this not least by formally announcing Hungary's candidature, as early as last autumn, for full membership of our Organisation - the first such central European candidature to be announced.

I have already mentioned your generosity towards those who preceded you. I would also mention your personal courage, for which you suffered imprisonment, following your part in the 1956 national uprising.

Mr Prime Minister, we are already aware of how much your country can contribute to Europe and to our Organisation. We have benefited from the active presence of parliamentary special guests since July last year and your Government have signed several important Council of Europe conventions. They have solemnly undertaken to sign the most important — that on human rights and fundamental freedoms - as soon as you have been granted full membership of the Council of Europe.

Your country's decision a year ago to allow transit to East German refugees was a striking example of putting humanitarian considerations first.

Let me single out, in conclusion, one field in which you are, I believe, destined to make a particular contribution: that of national minorities. As Mr Schieder's report points out, you have well understood that your natural concern for the five million Hungarians living outside your frontiers makes it all the more important that your treatment of minorities living in Hungary itself should be perfect.

In this spirit, your parliament has created Europe's first ombudsman for national and ethnic minorities, and your new Minorities Act is a great step towards a modern European minority's policy.

The fears of many Europeans will prove unfounded if, together, we can translate into reality the generous words of your governmental declaration in May:

"The time has come for national minorities to form the most important bridge of friendship among the countries."

Mr Prime Minister, I welcome you to the Council of Europe. Please have the floor.

Mr Jozsef ANTALL(*Prime Minister of Hungary*). - Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour for me to be able to address the Parliamentary Assembly here today. It is also a great pleasure, because the Assembly will today, before deciding on its position, be discussing the question of accession by the Republic of Hungary to the Council of Europe. For Hungary, and even for the whole of the region of Central and Eastern Europe, accession to the Council of Europe represents a historic step along the path which is bringing us back to Europe.

After forty years of Europe's artificial division, from which Hungary has suffered so much, we now have the possibility of rejoining the political, economic and cultural life of our continent as well as its systems of values and of ideas. I say "rejoining" because for over a thousand years Hungary has been an organic part of Europe's political, economic, cultural and religious development. Thanks to close human relationships, it has

never ceased to draw on these values; perhaps it has even enriched them.

In the course of its development as a state, it has always taken into account the standards and traditions of Western European societies. At great risk to its national existence, even losing more than once its status as a state or integrity, it has frequently defended European Christian civilisation. All this constitutes a historic and moral basis for Hungary to rejoin the process of European co-operation.

After 1945, on two occasions, the Hungarian people attempted unsuccessfully, under the banner of European democratic values, to regain the place which rightfully belongs to it in the life of our continent. In 1947 it was prevented by a communist regime supported from outside and then, in 1956, it was armed intervention that put an end to the Hungarian people's endeavours to achieve democratic fulfilment.

The path towards reintegration with Europe was opened up by the process of peaceful change initiated a year and a half ago under pressure from the then opposition, through the deliberations of the national Round Table. The main objective of these deliberations was the virtually impossible one of liquidating a totalitarian system by peaceful means and replacing it by a democracy in the European sense, a multipartite parliamentary system. The first free legislative elections in Hungary for forty-three years and the formation of my Government were salient events in the development leading to the achievement of that objective. From the political point of view, this process has now been completed by local government elections, which have enabled the conditions for democratic management to be created also at local level.

Obviously, a peaceful transition would not have been possible without a broad national consensus, without co-operating even with political adversaries who had recognized that the previous totalitarian system could not be reformed. Admittedly, it took forty years for this truth to be acknowledged. And now the government has at the same time to meet the challenge of the economic crisis, of overcoming that crisis, and the challenge of democratically transforming society. At the same time, the new government in Hungary is now working deliberately and determinedly to create a social market economy.

Hungary now has a President of the Republic, a government and local authorities freely and democratically elected, a multipartite parliament which functions and which, in recent months, has given the country a new constitution.

The foreign policy conducted in recent times by Hungary has been moving in the same direction. We have played and continue to play an active and constructive role in advancing the Helsinki process. This has provided a favourable basis for the establishment of increasingly close relations at an increasingly high level with the Council of Europe. We have recognized that the Council of Europe, which is now made up of twenty-three European democracies, is the driving force behind cultural co-operation and cultural identity in Europe.

At the same time, in the Council of Europe, it has been increasingly recognized that, in European culture as in other fields within the Council's brief, co-operation could not be achieved without the participation of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Hungary, since all these countries are undeniably part of Europe's cultural heritage. Thanks to all that, over the most recent period, political relations have grown constantly more intense between our country and the Council of Europe; the invitations received from Strasbourg by the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister of the previous government are a striking proof of that.

Mr Anders Bjarke Strømqvist, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, and Mrs Catherine Lalumière, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, have themselves visited Budapest several times. Our interparliamentary relations have also been intensified. Several Parliamentary Assembly committee meetings and events have taken place in Budapest and, since June 1989, Hungary has enjoyed special guest status in your Assembly, where six Hungarian members of parliament sit.

We very much appreciate the fact that for some time our observers have been able to observe the activities of almost all the committees of experts. In several fields, specific programmes of co operation have been

adopted; meetings with specialists, exchanges of information, training programmes have been implemented.

Hungary has already acceded to several conventions drawn up under the auspices of the Council of Europe, notably the European Cultural Convention. By signing the latter text we were declaring our belonging to the European cultural heritage. Our governmental experts are currently investigating possible accession to other agreements. When Hungary becomes a full member of the Council of Europe it intends to join the Social Development Fund, and we are also considering the prospects for our accession to the European Social Charter.

Over recent months we have been regularly invited to the sectoral ministerial meetings organized by the Council of Europe and other important events such as, most recently, the colloquy convened by the Secretary General. After our admission we would also heartily welcome sectoral ministerial meetings of other events in our own country. We would be very pleased if the European Youth Centre were to open an office in Budapest in accordance with the recommendation of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Youth in Lisbon, and we believe that the Council of Europe might also usefully set out an information and documentation centre in our capital.

The developments and projects which I have just outlined demonstrate that Hungary has been doing its utmost to justify its application for membership. Our application is all the more legitimate since, simultaneously with our entry into the Council of Europe, we are intending to sign the European Convention on Human Rights, which according to our estimations could be ratified approximately one year later. That would mean that Hungary unreservedly submits to the Council of Europe's machinery for protecting human rights.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Government of the Republic of Hungary attaches very great importance to our country's accession to the Council of Europe. We consider that the Council of Europe really is destined to become a cornerstone of the architecture of tomorrow's Europe. Once Hungary has attained full membership, we hope that in the near future Central and East European countries fulfilling the criteria for admission will also accede to the Organization, reinforcing its pan-European character and mission. Such a development might also help new members to live together with respect for the European standards defined in the Council of Europe.

We believe that the Council of Europe may play an important role in the process of European security and co operation, particularly in connection with the human dimension, because the Council of Europe's machinery for supervising and enforcing respect for human rights may also be implemented at any time by the Thirty-five. The Council of Europe may also take on a key role in defending the rights of minorities, a problem which affects us very particularly and for whose solution we place great hopes in the activities of the Commission on Democracy through Law which sits in Venice. In common with other European countries and in accordance with the stance adopted at the last NATO summit, we consider that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe will provide a solid foundation of a European Assembly of the thirty-five states.

Hungary is determined to make a constructive, exemplary contribution to settling the problems of minorities both inside and outside the country. We consider it necessary that the principles and frameworks be identified and approved at European level, but we are aware of the fact that given the specification of the various regions, countries and even the different minorities, a real solution cannot emerge until each practical case is considered in a very specific manner.

We consider that providing global safeguards on the rights of ethnic minorities is an integral part of democratic change. The aim of the law on minorities which is being prepared is, on the basis of man's right to an identity, to guarantee the conditions which minorities living in Hungary need to safeguard their identities and cultures organise themselves and enjoy autonomy. In pursuance of the same aims, we have set up the National and Ethnic Minorities Office, operating within the government, and have also introduced a Parliamentary Commissioner on the Rights of National and Ethnic Minorities, whose post is in fact enshrined in the Constitution.

Five million Hungarians live outside our country, including 3 500 000 in our direct vicinity; we are responsible for their fate, just as we are for that of minorities living in our countries.

We would like them to be able, while remaining Hungarian, to be loyal citizens of the country in which they live and we are ready to do our utmost to help them achieve this, in accordance with international law.

The aims and means of our endeavours comply with the Council of Europe's principles, ideas and legal solutions. We greatly appreciate the fact that, without providing overall protection for minorities, the Council of Europe, in its charters and conventions, puts forward major considerations for minorities, which are entirely applicable to the conditions specific to Central Europe. By voicing a desire to join the Council of Europe, we have undertaken to take account of all these considerations in our legislation, our international agreements and our everyday practices.

The Organization is in a strong position for finding means of involving the Soviet Union in a suitable manner, and of expediting its rapprochement with the community of European peoples.

Our membership would bring us several direct advantages: the Council of Europe's 135 conventions and the even more numerous recommendations could help our legislation to develop in accordance with European standards. The best example is the fact that our laws on local authorities and the election of their governing bodies have been drafted with respect for all the Council of Europe's relevant conventions and expert's recommendations.

Having said this, our accession to the Council of Europe would be an unequivocal symbol, for Hungarian and international public opinion, of how much has already been done to create a state based on the rule of law and would determine the direction we shall take, by offering us fresh opportunities for assimilating European values in these fields.

I should also like to stress that through the experiences of the Council of Europe it will be less difficult for us to take up the challenge that will confront us from 1992 with the creation of the European Community's single market. Since all the member states of the European Community are also Council of Europe member states, our accession should also enable us to strengthen our ties with the European Community. You are no doubt aware that we believe that our relations with the European Community are one of the keys to our integration into Europe. The Hungarian Government must therefore, in all fields, develop its relations with the Community and do its utmost to bring about the signing, as soon as possible, of an association agreement with that organization.

On the basis of the political resolution adopted at the European Community summit last April, the Hungarian Government, before signing such an association agreement, would wish to enter into the European political co-operation system to ensure that our foreign policy is in line with European aspirations.

This is why we were the first former communist country to associate ourselves with the sanctions imposed against Iraq by the United Nations Security Council.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, the opinions expressed by the various Parliamentary Assembly committees of the Council of Europe - the Political Affairs Committee meeting in Warsaw, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights meeting in Budapest and the Committee on Relations with European Non Member Countries meeting in Paris - have convinced me that you have a realistic vision of problems that still exist concerning the democratic development of my country and that you nevertheless consider that Hungary has fulfilled the conditions required to become a full member of the Council of Europe.

As Hungary's Prime Minister, I can assure you that my country shall, now and in the future, do its utmost to prove itself worthy of your trust. It is in the spirit, and having regard to the resolution recently adopted by the European Parliament, that I ask the Assembly to support the Hungarian Government's application for membership and to help Hungary, a country bound by age-old ties to European civilisation, to regain its

place among the free nations of our continent.

I thank you for your attention and shall be happy to answer your questions. (*Applause*)