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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Sixty years of European co-operation

Motion for a recommendation
tabled by Mr Wolfgang WODARG and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe celebrates with great satisfaction the sixtieth anniversary of the foundation of the Council of Europe through the Treaty of London on 5 May 1949 and the important enlargement of the Council of Europe's membership after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989.

Under the impression of human suffering at an unprecedented scale and lawless dictatorial rule during the Second World War, the birth of European co-operation was based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as cultural and social co-operation for the benefit of the people. Those are still the core objectives of the work of the Council of Europe, and their achievement remains a challenge to be pursued.

Sir Winston Churchill called for European co-operation in 1946 when he expressed the vision of creating a "Council of Europe" aiming at the establishment of the "United States of Europe". Under the Statute of the Council of Europe, member states retain their legislative and executive sovereignty, while committing themselves legally through the accession to international conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights of 1950.

In contrast hereto, the Schuman Plan of 9 May 1950 to create the European Coal and Steel Community was based on the transfer of national powers to a European Commission. In a sector of the economy which had been a condition for warfare in the two World Wars and was necessary for the reconstruction of countries after the Second World War, such a transfer of powers provided for greater transparency among its member states leading to greater mutual confidence. Reconciliation and co-operation greatly benefitted from such confidence in a very strategic sector.

Following the same model, the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community of 1957 developed gradually to the European Union as we know it today. The European Union has wide legislative and executive powers over its member states and therefore comes closer to Churchill's idea of the "United States of Europe". The difficulties in advancing with a constitution of the European Union show us that this project still takes time.

In the current European political landscape both, the Council of Europe and the European Union fulfil indispensible and complementary functions to create greater unity among states in Europe. Both institutions serve as concentric circles, with the Council of Europe being the geographically wider platform for co-operation with those European states which will not join a sui generis confederation of states under the European Union. It is important to recognise, however, that the states outside the European Union are not less European.

With its co-operation based on public international law, the Council of Europe can also open its legal standards to non-European states, several of which have acceded to Council of Europe conventions. The European Union has also signed Council of Europe conventions and participates in some of its Partial Agreements.

Sixty years after the foundation of the Council of Europe, it is more than ever necessary to maintain its achievements and further develop the many conventions which have become the common denominator for a Europe-wide co-operation. It would be counterproductive to duplicate them within the European Union or other organisations.

Composed of national parliaments, the Assembly serves as a political framework for the discussion and coordination of national policies at a truly European level. It gains its strength from the national legislative powers of its members. This European framework of national legislators must be employed to advance mutually on important common political objectives.

The African Union as well as the Organisation of American States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations follow paths comparable to the co-operation and integration in Europe over the past sixty years. The Council of Europe should strengthen its co-operation with these organisations as well as the United Nations.

The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

– raise public and political awareness of the importance of European co-operation beyond the European Union;

– study jointly with the Assembly new initiatives to facilitate and reinforce under the umbrella of the Council of Europe Europe-wide co-operation at national, regional, local and civic levels;

– ensure the ratification of Council of Europe conventions by member states and the opening for signature by non-member states of conventions which benefit form international accession;

– foster the mutual political and legal reinforcement of the Council of Europe and the European Union;

– strengthen the Council of Europe’s role as a regional organisation to, and an observer with, the United Nations.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed[1]*:*

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
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