



## Recommendation 1578 (2002)<sup>1</sup>

# The Council of Europe and the new issues involved in building Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The debate on the future of Europe launched by Declaration No. 23 appended to the Treaty of Nice (December 2000) and the setting up of the European Convention, at the Laeken Summit, will bring about major changes in Europe's institutional architecture.
2. The proliferation of European institutions and organisations since the end of the second world war and the gradual transformation of their initial aims should encourage the Council of Europe to position itself more effectively in the European arena by clarifying precisely the part it intends to play in the process of building Europe across the continent.
3. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that since the early 1990s there have been far-reaching changes in the Council of Europe's membership and objectives following the accession of many central and east European states. The two summits of heads of state and government (Vienna in 1993 and Strasbourg in 1997) have strengthened the Council of Europe politically, by developing its new expertise with regard to the protection of national minorities, democratic security, political stability and the monitoring of member states' obligations and commitments. Over the past decade the Council of Europe has confirmed its expertise in drawing up legal standards, monitoring their application and building up democratic institutions.
4. The European Union, with its growing range of responsibilities (see the 1992 Maastricht Treaty) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights signed at the Nice Summit (December 2000), is becoming increasingly active in sectors hitherto considered to be within the statutory remit of the Council of Europe. New relations of co-operation between the Council of Europe, the European Union and other European organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) must be proposed to avoid unnecessary overlapping of their activities.
5. In view of its fundamental principles of pluralist democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe must reassert its primary aim, which is to ensure peaceful unification and democratic stability in Europe, while consolidating its role as a pan-European political forum. It must continue to emphasise the indispensable contribution of its Assembly in representing the parliamentary dimension in this forum for the greater Europe. It must continue to promote the components of a European democratic identity based on the protection of human rights and the development of a culture of peace and dialogue, which it embodies and guarantees.
6. The Assembly notes that the Council of Europe is a highly effective and indeed irreplaceable forum for political contact between the European Union member countries and countries that will probably not join the European Union. It is the only truly European and continent-wide organisation in which all European countries co-operate on an equal footing.
7. The Parliamentary Assembly takes a positive view of the Council of Europe's work and deeply regrets that its achievements are not better known internationally. It also regrets the inadequacy of the resources granted to the Council, which is likely to undermine the effectiveness of its work.

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1. Assembly debate on 24 September 2002 (27th Sitting) (see [Doc. 9544](#), report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Prisacaru Text adopted by the Assembly on 24 September 2002 (27th Sitting)).



8. To promote the Organisation's image and meet the public's expectations, the Council of Europe should regularly organise public events and develop educational and other programmes which encourage respect for human rights, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the promotion of the common European values that shape our societies and identities. The Parliamentary Assembly accordingly declares its willingness to hold a colloquy to identify new perspectives reflecting the issues involved in the building of a united Europe, in the light of the aims pursued so far by the Council of Europe.

9. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its [Opinion No. 208 \(1999\)](#) Building greater Europe without dividing lines (opinion on the report of the Committee of Wise Persons), which states that the European Union must be regarded as the Council of Europe's natural partner. The Council of Europe and the European Union share the same ideals – the building of a peaceful, stable and prosperous Europe – and should therefore develop closer co-operation and institutional ties.

10. The Parliamentary Assembly consequently recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

*reinforce the Organisation's contribution on the basis of the new challenges facing Europe and shift the main focus of its activities to the area in which it has the most to offer: democratic security. Activities relating to monitoring, election rules, the European Court of Human Rights' judicial activity and the protection of minorities should be stepped up, in particular, because they concern areas in which the Council of Europe possesses recognised and indeed unequalled expertise;*

*take the necessary steps to allow the European Union to accede to the statute of the Council of Europe which would ultimately ensure a more effective sharing of responsibilities and consolidate the Council of Europe in its role as the Organisation covering the democratic area around the European Union;*

*propose that the European Union/European Community:*

a. *ratify the European Convention on Human Rights in order to harmonise human rights protection systems and ensure that respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in the Convention are guaranteed for all European Union citizens;*

b. *open an office in Strasbourg to ensure closer contact with the Council of Europe and make more active use of the opportunities for co-operation afforded by the existing texts;*

*invite the governments of the European Union member states to co-ordinate their policies more fully so as to, on the one hand, avoid the duplication of activities developed by the European Union and the Council of Europe and make optimum use of the complementary nature of their work, and on the other hand convey clear, consistent messages on European policy to the citizens of their member countries;*

*institutionalise the holding of Council of Europe summits to benefit from the political impetus they give at the highest level, with a view to promoting the Organisation's activities and reasserting its unique position on the international scene. In this connection the Assembly draws attention to its [Recommendation 1568 \(2002\)](#) on future co-operation between European institutions, proposing that a third summit should be convened to assess the Council of Europe's position in the future institutional architecture of Europe. The summit should be held in 2003, on the eve of the first stage in the European Union's enlargement towards the east;*

*reinforce and rationalise co-operation and co-ordination between the OSCE and the Council of Europe, in the light of their specific tasks and respective advantages, so that the international community may convey consistent messages. The most suitable way of doing this would seem to be to draw up a general outline agreement on co-operation and specific memoranda of agreement;*

*consider the setting up of a "troika" comprising high-level representatives of the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE, which would allow the three institutions to examine together the contribution which each of them foresees in respect of specific issues of common concern in the light of their respective mandates.*