

Council of Europe Summit
Sommet du Conseil de l'Europe
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Minutes of the Council of Europe Summit

(Vienna, 8-9 October 1993)

CORRIGENDUM

Please replace pages 11 and 12 of SUM (93) PV 2 with the attached pages.

Before ending, we also would like to welcome Romania.

The Greek Government and the Greek people will continue tirelessly to provide their support and assistance to the Council of Europe, so that the aim to make it a pan-European, pluralistic Organisation in a pan-European, multicultural and prosperous society be achieved."

9. The CHAIRMAN thanked Mrs Tsouderou for her intervention and expressed his interest in subsequently receiving more detailed information on those applicants where the Council of Europe, in a spirit of "Realpolitik", had not applied the same principles and criteria.

10. Mr BILDT, Prime Minister of Sweden, referring to earlier discussions on the respective roles of the various European institutions, stressed the unique role of the Council of Europe in safeguarding democracy and in ensuring respect of Human Rights in Europe. He felt that as far as the Council of Europe's standards were concerned, there was no room for compromise or dilution. Moreover, there was a need to review the records on respect for Human Rights and democracy not only of the new, but also of the old member States, and there was no other European organisation empowered to do this.

The task of building democracy was not easy. The older democracies of Western Europe had developed their democratic institutions progressively over a long period of time, a luxury not open to the new democracies. Furthermore, the notion of Human Rights required real content and not simply empty slogans. The Council of Europe played a vital role in this by translating into international legal instruments the values of a common European culture.

Sweden was proud of its record on Human Rights but was conscious of the imperfections that had existed hitherto and to some extent remained. In the past, majority rule alone had been seen as a sufficient guarantee of democratic rights, but the wider European tradition, as manifested in the European Convention on Human Rights pointed to the need for constitutional guarantees against an omnipotent state. To this end, Sweden will incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into its domestic law and he regarded this step as being of particular importance in the constitutional development of his country. Turning to the question of national and minority rights, whilst these were clearly very important, he felt that respect for individual human rights was more so. Individual human rights represented the very core of European civilisation and the cornerstone of European values. It was not sufficient, however, simply to embody these values into legal instruments: mechanisms for implementation and guarantee of human rights were also required. In this respect the reform of the Council's Human Rights organs was now pressing. Expansion of the Council of Europe and an increasing public awareness of the legal recourse at their disposal had placed an increasing burden on the control mechanisms of the Human Rights Convention, and he hoped that the strengthening of these mechanisms would take place as soon as possible.

The challenges of the 1990s for Europe were very great indeed: the reunification of a continent divided for too long was a complex and difficult task. This Summit meeting was taking place some 200 kilometres from the carnage taking place in the former Yugoslavia. The concomitant refugee problem bred ethnic and social tensions, tensions which were evident even in countries where there was no such open conflict. It was likely that the conflicts of the future would not be conflicts of ideologies but would stem rather from what he termed the fault-line of civilisations. Events in the mountains of Bosnia - the old frontier between Eastern and Western European churches, between Rome and Byzantium, the Roman and Ottoman Empires - were ample witness to the existence of such fault-lines.

The conflict in the former Yugoslavia had produced some one million refugees, ninety percent of which had been accepted into five countries only Austria, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. His own country had welcomed many for humanitarian reasons and was proposing to grant most of them permanent residence. Sweden's conviction was that there were no longer any "faraway countries of which we know little" in Europe and that all European States were under an obligation to offer support and help. If Sweden was proud of its contribution to the humanitarian effort, including its military contribution to UN peacekeeping, it was also conscious that there was an unequal burden-sharing which was no longer acceptable. The closing of borders, for example, was to turn one's back upon the joint responsibility that all European States shared.

He referred to the letter addressed to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Austria by Mrs Sadako Ogata, UNHCR High Commissioner, in which she had stressed the need for dialogue on the current European situation and for a strategy that should cover global refugee and migratory issues, in particular safe return and reintegration, and preventive and information policies.

In sum, emphasis should now firmly be placed on the rights of the individual as a means to avert conflict, and more equitable burden-sharing arrangements should be put in place. Dialogue on these issues should no longer be delayed either at the European level or that of national governments.

11. The CHAIRMAN concurred with Prime Minister Bildt's remark on the conflictual situations which arise amongst individuals or groups within the Western European societies, for example as a result of the increasing flow of refugees from areas of conflict. There existed, indeed, theories analysing the behaviour of society after the nuclear threat had disappeared. The revival of old-rooted patterns of the enemy was one of the consequences, ie, the neighbour became again the favourite enemy. This also explained the increasing conflictual situations within European cities.