4. CO-OPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN

Mr. Iwinski, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the Chair in place of Mr. Radulescu Botica.

The President (Translation). - The next item of business this morning is the debate on the report on co-operation in the Mediterranean basin, presented by Mr. Parisi on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities. We will also hear the contribution of various committees.

The list of speakers closed at 6 pm yesterday; 13 names are on the list and eight amendments have been tabled.

I remind you that we have already agreed that speaking time in the debate for all speakers, including the spokesmen of committees, be limited to five minutes. In order to finish by 1.30 pm, we must conclude the general debate by about 1 pm to allow time for the reply and the vote.

I should point out a correction to the speakers' list. Mr. Inomu is, in fact, speaking as spokesman of the Committee on Science and Technology, and so he will be called immediately after Mr. Pozzo. In addition, Mr. Pavlidis will be speaking as spokesman of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. I call Mr. Parisi to present his report. He has 10 minutes.

Mr. PARISI (Italy) (Rapporteur of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities) began by asking the Bureau not to hold the next debate on the work of this committee on a Friday morning, especially when time was so limited.

The Council of Europe intended to reactivate the plan for closer co-operation in the Mediterranean basin. The problems in this area were daunting. There was a demographical imbalance, large migratory flows and a developmental imbalance. That was why the Council of Europe held it to be a priority. Various organisations at various levels were also committed to this work. The Council of Europe's specific role was public sector and cultural policy working through, inter alia, the network of local authorities. The draft recommendation outlined the first steps along that forgotten path.

He said that the peoples of the Mediterranean basin had perhaps lost their sense of history but not a sense of their needs. There had been many civilisations in that area which had integrated many cultures. The question was what to do. He referred to the seeking of an increasingly active role for the Council of Europe and stressed the need for co-operation. Many initiatives were being taken at different levels.

Mr. VELLA (Malta). - It has become almost obligatory, when discussing reports in the Assembly on a Friday morning, for delegates to deplore the fact that the report was left to the last day. We must all fulfil our duties by participating actively in all the activities of the Assembly, even on Friday mornings.

The Rapporteur, Mr. Parisi, who comes from Sicily, has the best of credentials and has drawn up an excellent report.

As a consequence of the disparity in wealth and population between the northern and southern coastal states, the Mediterranean
basin has become a problem of alarming proportions. Some of the contributory factors are age old, while others are relatively new. One expects the Mediterranean Sea - which, for thousands of years, has been the seat of numerous conflicts between neighbouring states - to be anything but a calm and peaceful lake in an otherwise turbulent world. The recent conflict in the former Yugoslavia is a case in point. The fragmentation of that seemingly well-organised and disciplined nation showed how religious, ethnic, economic and political factors can contribute to sudden and awful armed confrontation. While it was happening, Europe, despite all good will, was practically impotent. Furthermore, we all know that Albania and Greece and Greece and Macedonia are definitely not on the best of friendly, neighbourly terms.

For more than 20 years, Cyprus - a member of the Council of Europe - has been a divided country. The easing of tension and the prospect of peace in the Middle East is perhaps the best recent omen. It will take many years before the state of Israel and the eventual state of Palestine co-operate with each other and with other Arab states, so that security and stability prevail in the Middle East. However the die is cast and there is no looking back. Eventually, the lack of certainty and mistrust that exists in the Middle East will disappear.

Perhaps the greatest contributory factor in the anxiety that surrounds security and stability in the Mediterranean is its growing population. Forty-five years ago, the population of the countries of the northern Mediterranean was twice that of those in the south. In 35 years' time, that situation will be completely reversed. The southern Mediterranean is rapidly becoming overpopulated and an increasingly younger generation is clamouring for work and for food, which are not available. That gives rise to unrest and migration. In the past few years we have seen the monster of fundamentalism, as distinct from Islam, raise its ugly head - particularly in Egypt and Algeria. That is destabilising for the whole Mediterranean region. Democracy and human rights are bound to suffer. The people of those countries are seeking pastures new by trying - more often than not, illegally - to migrate to our northern shores in alarmingly increasing numbers.

Apart from the demographic problem, our environment is also a cause of concern. Not only states on the Mediterranean littoral but the whole of Europe must take responsibility for that. I refer not only to pollution and over-fishing, which we should do our utmost to control, but the protection of natural resources, including marine resources such as oil and minerals. That should figure prominently in the Council of Europe's policy.

Given the dangers and responsibilities that face us all, it is obvious that we must act quickly to prevent a catastrophe that may be more imminent than one cares to imagine. We should heartily welcome paragraph 10 of the recommendations and include the Council's Mediterranean policy on the agenda of its next ministerial meeting.

The Council of Europe has an important role to play, but it is not alone in that regard. In the 1980s, the 5 + 5 sought to focus on specific issues arising from social imbalance between the northern and southern Mediterranean. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, albeit reluctantly, included the Mediterranean chapter in the Helsinki Final Act. Today, however, the CSCE frequently involves non-participating Mediterranean states in its activities. In Corfu
this summer, the European Union indicated that it was taking a new look at its Mediterranean policy. Even the Assembly of the North Atlantic Alliance held a seminar in Capri last month to which non-member Mediterranean states were invited and in which they actively participated. Although this has never got off the ground, a CSCM process presents a sufficiently broad and active agenda. Recently, Mediterranean basin states became involved in a project to launch the so-called Mediterranean Forum.

Malta, situated as it is at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, has been and is actively involved in all those processes. We believe that security and stability in the Mediterranean region are our lifeline and we readily contribute resources to help achieve them. A stable Mediterranean means the proliferation of democracy and of human rights that are sorely missing in some southern Mediterranean countries but which are, after all, the pillars of the Council of Europe.

The PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Dr Vella. I give the floor to Mr Kaspereit, who will address the Assembly as a spokesman for the Political Affairs Committee.

Mr KASPEREIT (France), speaking on behalf of the Political Affairs Committee, said that there had been co-operation on economic and cultural matters but this now needed to be broadened to encompass political matters as well. He appreciated that there were internal tensions in some southern Mediterranean countries, especially Algeria and Egypt.

He felt that a process similar to the CSCE should be applied, expressing an interest in the establishment of a Conference on Security and Co-operation for the Mediterranean (CSCM). The security of the southern Mediterranean was inextricably linked to that of the rest of Europe. There were many matters that were of concern to the Council of Europe; the war in former Yugoslavia, the slow progress of the Middle East peace talks and the increase in Islamic fundamentalism. Mr Kaspereit understood that Egypt had expressed an interest in a forum which would look at security and environmental issues relating to the Mediterranean.

He regretted that this debate was taking place on a Friday; he felt that this was an important issue and should have taken precedence over other subjects which had been debated during the week.

The PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Mr Kaspereit. I invite Mr Cucó to speak on behalf of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography.

Mr CUCÓ (Spain) (spokesman for the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography) said that there were different population growth rates in the north and in the south of the Mediterranean basin. It was estimated that population in the south would double by the year 2025, from 161 million to 340 million. There were also other problems in the southern Mediterranean countries such as the rise in unemployment and growth in foreign debt. This was leading to political instability and an increase in religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism was not a new phenomenon but at the moment there was nothing to contain its effects in southern Mediterranean countries. In the last ten years, France, Italy and Spain had witnessed a doubling in the number of their immigrants from the southern Mediterranean. It was necessary to provide social, economic and cultural facilities to avoid the rise of racism and xenophobia. Investment was also necessary in their countries of origin to defuse the population