Yesterday, in discussing the Masseret report, the Assembly returned to a topic that has been a classic ever since the Council of Europe was founded: the future architecture of Europe. The focus is now on the preparations for the 1995 Intergovernmental Conference of the European Union. Why is this matter a concern for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe? I would point to four different reasons.

First, the Assembly represents greater democratic Europe - not only the 15 states that are now members of the Union, but also about as many that would like to become members. The future structure of the Union is of keen interest to all those states. Secondly, the Assembly has its roots in the national parliaments which are directly affected by the outcome of the IGC. If the European project is to retain its support and its legitimacy in the eyes of our citizens, a proper balance must be struck between supranational and national decision-making. Thirdly, the overriding issues of European institutional design have always been a subject for the Council of Europe. That task is exercised both through periodic general debates and through the examination of particular organisations - first the OECD, but now also the EBRD and the Economic Commission for Europe - that are regularly undertaken by the Parliamentary Assembly. There have also been regular debates on important developments in the European Community, such as the Maastricht Treaty.

Finally, the Council of Europe itself is also affected by this conference. In defining its future competence and functions, the European Union will also take into account the functions to be handled both individually by member states and by other European institutions. That is why all participants in this discussion should be aware of the distinct contributions of the Council of Europe, past, present and future - its role as a guardian of the core values of pluralist democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights; its role as an organiser of common European projects and programmes in areas where member states want to retain their sovereignty and prefer intergovernmental co-operation to supranational solutions; and also its role as a pan-European organisation, extending to all the states of democratic Europe the programmes and projects that need a broad European basis.

To be efficient, the Council of Europe must co-operate closely with other European organisations. I am glad to report to you that those contacts are developing quite successfully. After four years' interruption, the "quadripartite" meetings between the European Union and the Council of Europe have been resumed, and there is now an understanding between the two organisations that they will intensify their co-operation, not least with regard to central and eastern Europe. An example is our active participation in the Union's work leading up to the Stability Pact. The contributions of the Council of Europe played an important part, both in the resolutions of the Parliamentary Assembly and the framework convention on the protection of national minorities.

The daily practical co-operation with the European Union has also developed in a satisfactory way. That does not mean that there is no room for improvement; there should be room for more joint projects, for instance in the field of culture and the promotion of the common European identity. We also need to avoid duplication, for instance in the fight against racism, intolerance and xenophobia. We are also developing a good relationship with the OSCE, which is now entrusted with the main responsibility for the Stability Pact. A first "quadripartite-type" meeting with the OSCE took place in February this year, and practical co-operation in the field is becoming more and more important.
The Council of Europe has two statutory organs: the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. It is very important that those bodies work in close contact, and again I think good progress is under way. There is even a certain infiltration: since I assumed office last June one member of the Assembly has become ambassador to the Council of Europe, another two have become deputy foreign ministers and no fewer than six members of the Assembly have become foreign ministers and hence members of the Committee of Ministers. If this trend continues, the Parliamentary Assembly will have taken over entirely within a few years.

Let me end on a more serious note. Contacts between the two bodies are increasingly necessary, because we face extraordinary challenges. The values that we stand for are still under serious threat. They are under threat in some of our member states and they are under threat in applicant states, as the urgent debates in January on Chechnya and yesterday on Turkey have made abundantly clear.

Let me mention just one particular dimension: freedom of expression. In far too many European states, governments' attitude to the mass media still reflects the attitudes of old party apparatchiks. There are far too many attempts to muzzle the media by fiscal constraints, by the sacking of critical journalists and by excessive intervention in the management of broadcasting companies. There is systematic harassment of media personnel who are alleged to have offended people in high office or to have supported terrorists and secessionists, or who just irritate those who wield power.

Not one, not two, but many of our governments need to be told that there is no way in which to handle the media in a free society, and no way to handle political opponents. It is sometimes said that a country with a free press but no elections is at least half a democracy, whereas a country with elections but no free press has nothing whatever to do with a democracy. We still have a long way to go before freedom of expression is safe in all our 34 member states.