Tuesday 4 October 1994 at 10 am

Mr Ion ILIESCU (President of Romania) - I wish to express my most cordial thanks for your invitation to address the most representative forum of European democracy. It is a great pleasure for me to address the Parliamentary Assembly under your presidency, Mr President. Mr Miguel Angel Martínez has long been a faithful friend of Romania.

Romanian society is currently coming to the end of an extremely important phase of reforms, namely the so-called "grand privatisation" affecting over 6,000 major state companies. Parliament is also considering a series of measures proposed by the government to speed up that process. It is our hope that in this way the reforms and economic restructuring will be stimulated by attracting not only the internal resources and investment but external capital and loans, positively affecting our people's living standards.

With these prospects in mind, Romania has decided to sign the European Social Charter today. We have taken this decision in the sure knowledge that the ultimate goal of all the political and economic reforms which we have undertaken is that of improving the living conditions of every member of our society.

For Romania, situated as it is at the crossroads of the main geopolitical axes of the continent, ensuring peace and stability throughout Europe is a question of vital interest. Consequently, the central thrust of Romania's foreign policy takes its inspiration from the strategic decision taken on the very first day of the Romanian revolution and still backed today, as then, by every political force in the country, namely Romania's full integration into all European political, economic and security bodies. It is a perfectly natural decision given that the Romanian nation, by its civilisation, culture, history and geographical position, has always been part and parcel of European culture and civilisation. For us, the 1989 revolution marked the beginning of the restoration and development, in new conditions, of our traditional links with other European nations. It is significant therefore that less than three months after the victorious revolution of December 1989, Romania was already expressing official interest in joining the Council of Europe.

Apart from its participation in the activities of the Council of Europe and CSCE, Romania is also stepping up its cooperation in all ways with the European Union, NATO and WEU. We are quite satisfied that, once the last two ratifications have been made, our association agreement with the European Union will come into effect in the near future - we hope before the end of the year. That will lay the way open for speeding up the necessary preparations for our becoming a member of that organisation, which we know will not be easy.

Along the same lines, we welcomed the initiative taken by the United States concerning the Partnership for Peace and we recently signed the Individual Partnership Programme between Romania and NATO.

We are involved in interesting cooperation with WEU as an associate partner. We have already had a positive experience of cooperation over action to monitor observance along the Danube of sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council on Yugoslavia.
Everyone recognises that achievement of a united, democratic, peaceful and prosperous Europe is the joint goal of several organisations and institutions including the CSCE, Council of Europe, EU, NATO and WEU. Substantial contributions are also made by the European programmes of the UN and its specialised institutions, especially UNESCO, ILO, WHO and FAO, as well as the ECE.

Of all these organisations, the Council of Europe plays a particular role. The Council of Europe is the only organisation with a truly pan-European vocation offering a political framework for exchanges of ideas between all European countries about issues of common interest, linked to the operation of democratic institutions and the consolidation of democracy, the guarantee of human rights and the strengthening of the rule of law. This is the essence of the Council of Europe’s activity and all these issues are at the forefront of interstate relations. The issues of observance and protection of human rights are directly connected with national and Europe-wide stability alike. As a result, the creation of a European democratic area is a vital factor for the stability and security of our continent or, in other words, their democratic dimension.

In view of its position, the Council of Europe is currently conducting priority activities of great importance for future peace and security in Europe, with a view to implementing the decisions taken at the Vienna Summit. First, they are aimed at consolidating the foundations of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Secondly, the Council is endeavouring to enlarge co-operation between European states in combating instances of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance, which undermine the democratic fabric of European nations and, implicitly, the stability of the continent. The Council’s action under these two priority directions represents a genuine partnership for democracy and stability in Europe, to which Romania is determined to make a constructive contribution.

In view of the over-politicisation of the minorities’ problem, we are tempted to address this theme as a source of tension and potential strife. In fact, however, the existence of ethnic minorities all over our continent can and must be regarded in a completely different manner.

When persons belonging to national minorities are satisfied that their rights are being protected as equal and loyal citizens of the states in which they live, including their cultural and spiritual values which enhance and unite European cultural unity, minorities - as integral parts of the societies in which they live - must be regarded as factors for rapprochement, as bridges between the European nations. Such an approach to the minorities’ issue would be a solid foundation on which we could build up neighbourly relations between states - a requirement which is particularly important and topical.

We are convinced that in order to achieve this objective the Council’s efforts must be matched by work at the regional, national and local levels. In this spirit we welcomed the European Union’s initiative regarding the stability pact and expressed our willingness to co-operate with the other states involved in accomplishing the aims of this initiative. Similarly, we are developing positive co-operation with the CSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities.