shall follow developments in this area within the framework of our monitoring procedure, which this Assembly set up in order to foster throughout our continent the democratic values of the Council of Europe.

This morning the Assembly recommended that the second summit of heads of state and government of the countries of the Council of Europe be held in Strasbourg next autumn. The importance of this event is that your country and others, which have obtained membership after the Vienna Summit, will take part in shaping the future of the Council of Europe.

All of us are eager to listen to your statement, Mr. President, and I am happy to give you the floor.

Mr. ULMANIS (State President of the Republic of Latvia) It is truly a great pleasure and honour for me to address the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. This organisation has worked very closely with Latvia since the renewal of our independence, and therefore I attach great importance to my dialogue with you today.

Following the end of Soviet occupation and withdrawal of Russian troops, development in Latvia has been very rapid in all spheres of life. I believe that in the past five years we have covered a distance over which other European nations have taken decades. The Soviet Iron Curtain has been replaced by a modern, open, democratic system, and a civic society is forming in the place of an ideologised Soviet society. Free market principles have ousted Soviet protectionism and outstanding personalities are valued over impersonal Soviet collectivism.

Could Latvia be ready for the future? Would it be an exaggeration to say, "Yes"? There is a traditional Latvian saying with a similar question about our capital, "Is Riga ready yet?" If the answer is in the affirmative, Riga will sink into an abyss.

We think of our readiness for Europe as conformity with the criteria of modern-day Europe and as an understanding of the definitive issues and challenges of tomorrow. Destinies of European nations can be described by several notions. The nation state is one of them. This notion is disputable and ambivalent. A look into the history of our continent shows that almost any country in Europe has been created by its title-nation, for which this country is the only territory in the world where the nation can preserve itself. The title-nation enjoys the decisive role in developing the country's identity. On the other hand, a nation state gains by its ability to sustain a certain openness and to integrate the riches of culture and ideas of other nationalities.

The cultural region is another notion. Historically, seldom have a nation state and a cultural region covered geographically identical territories, thus often making them contradictory notions. The link that joins these notions is the constant need to integrate what is always initially "alien" and from which we only want to distance ourselves. At the same time, however, we are all aware of the criteria which serve as a litmus test for determining what is to be accepted and what is to be rejected.

Strasbourg is located in Alsace, one of Europe's cultural regions. Historically a number of cultural and linguistic layers have formed here. A look into the cultural environment and contemporary life of Strasbourg easily prompts the conclusion that this
wonderful city has been created by the fusion of the ideas and efforts of many different people.

As a rock has a vein, Europe also has its own golden reef. That is precisely why Strasbourg was chosen as the seat of the Council of Europe and the Parliament of the European Union. Strasbourg is truly one of Europe's "capitals". Does the experience of Strasbourg suffice to conclude that Europe is ready for the future?

Latvia has several links with the seat of the Council of Europe. Almost two and a half centuries ago, Herder, the German philosopher came to Strasbourg. He had just spent five years in Riga and for a long time his attention was focused on the ideas of cultural heritage of the European nations and the preservation of their identities. The years he spent in the Baltic proved that Europe is more than the culture of the large nations. The philosopher was particularly interested in the spiritual world of the small nations. The frequently forgotten smaller nations have a world of ideas that make the European mosaic perfect and complete. The Baltic - both in Herder's day and today - is a cultural region with a European identity.

Knowing that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is a forum used to open discussion, I have decided to touch upon the problem in the context in which the future of all European nation states is viewed. The issue is our national security and I would like to expand on one aspect of it, namely that a united and integrated society is a prerequisite for national security. Therefore, I believe that the security and viability of the European nation state will be directly dependent on the extent of our ability and willingness to integrate what is alien. To me, the word "alien" describes ideas, values and opinions that have come from elsewhere, as well as people who have come from other lands. The model of a European state is linked to our ability to determine the difference between that which can be and even should be integrated without undermining the identity of the state, and that which would endanger its identity. When looking at states in different regions of Europe, it is easy to acknowledge the extent to which this challenge is linked to the peaceful and prosperous future of the whole continent.

Must everything that is alien be integrated? Could Europe be ready for the future? Which are the criteria that enable us to differentiate without error between the acceptable and the unacceptable? Notions about the identity of the Latvian people help me when I think about the future of Europe as do notions about the traditional rural environment close to the Latvians.