Pages 17-22: delete the speech of Mr Kostov (Prime Minister of Bulgaria) and insert the following:

Mr KOSTOV (Prime Minister of Bulgaria)

Esteemed Madam President,
distinguished members of European parliaments, ladies and gentlemen, may I first and foremost voice my thanks to you, Mrs Fischer, for the invitation to speak before this prestigious forum. Today, one year after the United Democratic Forces won the elections and formed a government, I am highly honoured and privileged to address you, the representatives of the European nations in the Parliamentary Assembly of the oldest European intergovernmental organisation. At the turn of a century, which is particularly sensitive to symbols, the Council of Europe symbolises the political principles of a state which is committed to the rule of law, representative democracy and respect for human rights as well as the centuries-old European system of values.

It is precisely because we are at the turn of a century which divides Europe that the challenges of the coming century stand out in bold relief. Probably "Europe" is the unrivalled word that is pronounced in this hall most often and with the greatest hope. Probably everyone in this hall believes that "Europe" will be the key word in the coming century. The Bulgarian Government and the Bulgarian public cherish the same hope. However, today when Kosovo hits the headlines of European newspapers, I remember that on 9 November 1989, when the Berlin Wall fell, the American journalist Robert Kaplan wrote from Kosovo to describe his vision of the replacement of the ideological wall dividing eastern and western Europe by a cultural wall that was to separate Europe from the Balkans.

If the word "Europe" is to be the key word in the coming century we have to prevent the erection of such a wall. The fortitude that the Bulgarian civil society demonstrated in the winter of 1997 and the support that my government gets for the radical reforms to be implemented gives me reason to think that the wall of no-reform and neo-communist arrogance that was fencing Bulgaria from democratic Europe in 1993 - 1996 has been demolished. However, other walls remain to be demolished.

The challenges of changing Europe redefined, among other things, the mission of the Council of Europe and made it a symbol of European universality. The first summit in 1993 defined the new priorities of this organisation by the notion of "democratic security". The notion of "democratic security" assumes, in addition to growing security as democracy expands geographically and new democracies emerge, the strengthening of the European security as the process of democratisation in each country deepens. Free elections cannot sufficiently guarantee that a system is democratic. We all witness cases when freely elected governments infringe on citizens’ freedoms and violate the principles of constitutionality. The choice that the Balkans are facing today is to prevent the imposition of an oligarchic or populist regime typical of which is that some time-honoured democratic instruments like the referendum are resorted to in order to foster ethnic intolerance and safeguard personal rule. In that sense democratic culture is the best indicator of the irreversibility of democracy. I am glad that the Second Summit in October 1997 mapped out the strategy of the European culture of democracy for the 21st century.
The action plan included as a feature of this culture the Bulgarian initiative on educating citizens with a view to raising their awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. We expect this initiative to be furthered and concretised through an efficient follow up. We believe it is necessary because for many years the totalitarian regime emphasised the citizens’ obligations while it ignored basic human rights and freedoms. This policy resulted in the distortion of the criteria of indivisibility and interdependence of rights and responsibilities inherent to every democratic civil society. We see the consequences today in acts of intolerance, insufficient respect and even neglect for democratic institutions, growing crime in general and organised crime in particular.

The absence of adequate democratic culture and the neglect for the indivisibility of rights and responsibilities of citizens are not characteristic only of eastern Europe; these affect the whole continent. Examples are the manifestations of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and exacerbation of inter-ethnic problems. In its capacity as architect and defender of democratic security, the Council of Europe is called upon to react to these disturbing phenomena, and to undertake adequate measures by enhancing the role of education and democratic citizenship. It is not sufficient for citizens to have rights; citizens should know these rights in order to be capable of defending them.

Throughout the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria was labelled an "island of stability". The United Nations-imposed Yugo embargo turned Bulgaria into an island indeed, by closing many of the country’s economic routes to Europe. Today, the economic and political opening of the region is crucial for us. The real integration of the Balkans in Europe means, first and foremost, the establishment of sound economic relations, influx of sizeable capital and the transformation of the region into an infrastructure and energy centre which is open to the Middle East, central Asia and the Caspian Basin. Our government perceives a geopolitical role for our country in the Balkans in transforming the region which is a potential generator of tensions and conflicts into a zone of security and stability and a gateway open to Europe.

Bulgaria has undertaken a series of foreign policy steps to strengthen peace and security in south-eastern Europe: participation in and playing host to meetings of the ministers of defence, transport and energy, initiating trilateral meetings on different levels - including top level - between Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, as well as between Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. These trilateral meetings are dedicated to specific problems, for instance, combating organised cross-border crime. These endeavours of Bulgaria in multilateral regional co-operation have already produced results: for the first time, states of south-eastern Europe, at the initiative of Bulgarian diplomacy, reacted promptly and concertedly to a crisis development in the Balkan region. I have in mind the Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Turkey and Macedonia on the situation in Kosovo adopted on 10 March 1998. The Declaration proposed specific measures for overcoming the crisis and was supported by the Contact Group. Perhaps it won’t be an exaggeration to call this initiative an historic stride forward for the states of the region, that, for the first time after many decades have come up with an agreed common stand on a problem which affects the destinies of the region. The Declaration will serve as a basis for joint concerted actions of states in the region in tune with the actions of the international community, the United States, the European Union and the Contact Group.