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Speech by Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON
Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly President

at the opening of the 4th part of the 1999 Session of the Council of Europe
Parliamentary Assembly (Strasbourg, 20 September 1999)

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Dear colleagues,

I wish to welcome you on the occasion of the September part-session of the Assembly.

It has been a turbulent and sad summer. The summer which, in a tragic accident, took away the lives of several Romanian parliamentarians and parliamentary officials, including our colleagues Ovidiu Sincai, a member of the Romanian delegation, and Mrs Iulia Bunea, the delegation's secretary.

The cruelty of nature provoked enormous loss of human lives in an earthquake which hit Western Turkey. Thousands died, and many more were left homeless. Shortly afterwards, another earthquake killed more than a hundred people in Greece. In addition, Greece very recently lost its Deputy Foreign Minister Yannis Kranidiotis.

The solidarity and the sympathy that the two neighbours have shown to each other on these tragic occasions created a yet unseen opportunity for better relations between the two countries, ~~the~~ relations that have for so many years been dominated by tensions and resentment.

In Moscow, and in other cities across Russia death and destruction were not caused by nature.

They were the result of intentional, indiscriminate savagery, of the incomprehensible belief that one can somehow justify the murder of innocent people, of entire families, killed mercilessly in their sleep.

But there is not and cannot be, any justification, and we should condemn, in the strongest and most unequivocal terms, those who sponsored and committed these barbaric and cowardly acts.

On a more positive note, this summer also brought a glimmer of hope to the suffering population of Kosovo. A massive effort on the part of the international community is being made to resolve the extremely difficult humanitarian situation, bring some normality into everyday life, build Kosovo's democratic institutions and provide security for all its ethnic communities.

The Council of Europe is contributing to these efforts in the areas of its expertise, and it is hoped that our contribution will further increase and widen in scope.

With the new situation in Kosovo, the political and economic future of South East Europe is gradually taking shape. The Stability Pact is providing the basis for regional economic development and political stability.

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia remains the big black hole in this process. On Wednesday, during the debate on the situation in South East Europe after the Kosovo crisis, we shall have the opportunity to hear a statement by Mr Milo Djukanovic.

Montenegro is today at ^a the crossroads, focusing intensively on preserving the results of its political and economic reforms, which are being threatened by the Belgrade regime.

The outcome of this confrontation will not only decide the future of Montenegro, but also indicate whether Serbia will finally embark on the path of democracy, or remain a corrupted, and internationally isolated dictatorship.

In East Timor, the anti-independence militia, backed by elements in the Indonesian army, killed thousands of people. Perhaps those who planned and put into action this savage campaign to ethnically cleanse East Timor believed, as the architects of the Serb crimes in Kosovo had done before them, that the international community will watch impotently, and allow them to achieve this fait accompli.

But this time they were wrong. Confronted with massive pressure from abroad, the Indonesian Government had to agree to the sending of ~~the~~ international troops.

The intervention in East Timor will be a complicated and extremely dangerous mission for the participating troops, but it is important that it is taking place and that it is taking place so quickly. After the experience of Kosovo the international community is demonstrating an unprecedented readiness to act in a quicker and more coherent way, when confronted with massive violations of human rights.

This is of course encouraging, but it should not let us believe that the international community is henceforth ready to intervene every time and everywhere a Kosovo or East Timor-like situation occurs. We are at the beginning of the process, in which the first, giant steps have been made, but there is still a long way to go.

Many countries continue to favour a selective defence of territorial integrity to the consistent protection of human rights. It would be naive to believe that the likes of Milosevic will not attempt to take advantage of this.

Kosovo and East Timor, in a dramatic way, again demonstrated how costly and difficult it is for the international community to intervene when the situation is already out of hand.