Mr President,

For the second time, as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, I have the honour of presenting the Committee’s activities to the Parliamentary Assembly. When I made my first statement to you, the international agenda was dominated by the political settlement of the conflict in Kosovo and the prospects this opened up for the development and stability of the whole of South-East Europe.

This issue is still the major item of current political concern to the Council of Europe. As you know, the Council is working on two parallel fronts, namely its contribution to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 on Kosovo, and its participation in the joint efforts by the international community to promote the development and stability of the whole of South-East Europe.

Implementation of the Council of Europe’s Stability Programme for South-East Europe, approved at the 104th session of the Committee of Ministers in Budapest, continued actively throughout the summer. In addition, the Council has continued to play its role as a full participant in the Stability Pact for South-East Europe launched by the European Union in Cologne. At your suggestion, I participated in the Sarajevo Summit for stability in the Balkans. In the Summit Declaration, the participants stressed the important role played by the Council of Europe in the implementation of the pact.

In the last few weeks, the need for a stronger Council of Europe presence in the region has been felt even more keenly. The Committee of Ministers has been active in this area. The mandate of the office in Mostar been extended until the end of the year. In addition a Council of Europe office has been operational in Pristina since 23 August. With regard to the setting up of an office in Belgrade, no decision has been taken yet. This question has to be considered in the wider context of the development of the situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Council’s relations with Belgrade. In my view the return to normal life in Yugoslavia must go hand in hand with the application of the fundamental values of the Council of Europe. We must be ready to help in this process of normalisation. This will mean at some point a Council of Europe presence in Belgrade.

The Council of Europe has always been firmly convinced that the Serbian people has a role to play as a full participant, alongside the other European peoples, in the building
of Greater Europe, and it has always stated its readiness to provide whatever assistance is needed to attain this common objective. These clear statements are more valid today than ever before, and will be translated into action as soon as developments in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia permit.

As our new Secretary General has emphasised, the enlargement of the Council of Europe to include those European countries which are not yet members is a challenge both for the Organisation and for the countries in question. The Committee of Ministers is following very closely the discussions which are currently in progress in the Assembly committees responsible for considering the membership applications of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Monaco.

The Committee of Ministers is also addressing the issue of relations between the Council of Europe and Belarus. The full resumption of relations between the Council and the authorities in Minsk depends above all on the Belarusian leaders' willingness to anchor their country in the system of shared values of the Council of Europe member states. This is the message which our Deputies will be giving to the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus in the discussion which they will shortly be holding with him in Strasbourg.

However, neither the enlargement which has already taken place nor that which is to come will be fully successful unless the parallel process, namely the consolidation of the Council, is also carried through to a successful conclusion.

First of all, consolidation depends on our ability to implement the decisions we have taken on priorities and to honour the commitments which we have given "to each other, to the Council of Europe and to our citizens".

With this in mind, the Committee of Ministers has continued to place the emphasis on implementation of the Strasbourg Summit action plan and on follow-up to the Budapest Declaration.