Europe.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Mr Laakso. I call Mrs Degn.

Mrs DEGN (Denmark).- I have been asked by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development - I am its Chairperson - to address on its behalf a number of points that are raised in the report of the Committee of Wise Persons.

From the point of view of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, there could be no more suitable title than that of the Committee of Wise Persons report, which is "Building Greater Europe without dividing lines". That title reflects what we feel about Europe. We explicitly want to build that "Greater Europe", and we explicitly want that Europe not to have dividing lines.

For a full decade the committee has tried to help in the process described by the report of the Committee of Wise Persons: to ensure that the economic transformation under way in central and eastern Europe is brought to a successful conclusion. However, we feel that much still needs to be done in the so-called established market economies in western Europe. This includes the European Union, where 11 countries now share a common currency. There, too, major structural reforms will have to be carried out. None of our 40 member countries can rest on its laurels in economic terms.

The Committee of Wise Persons' report emphasises the Council of Europe's aims "to promote pluralist democracy, the rule of law and human rights". It refers to the Council's contribution to cohesion, stability and security in Europe. Indeed, these aims were
proclaimed at the Council of Europe’s summits of heads of state and government in 1993 and 1997. The report also refers for the need for us all to take a dynamic rather than a static approach to problems.

Democracy, the rule of law and human rights are not things that we achieve once and for all, allowing us then to forget about them. They are not like a diploma that we hang on the wall as a guarantee for all time to come. No, we in the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development believe that democracy, the rule of law and human rights - like social cohesion, stability and European security - can be maintained only if we have economic growth and development.

There are those who say that we can live with zero growth. They do not realise how many people in our midst suffer from poverty or a precarious economic position. Today, with technological development being what it is, a minimum of 2.5% growth is needed every year just to prevent unemployment rising. If there is any growth figure less than that, unemployment will rise from an already worrying level. Higher growth than 2.5% is needed to reduce unemployment, however modestly. If growth is slow or non-existent, extremist parties may easily arise. If that were to happen, all the values that we cherish, and all the values for which our Organisation stands could be swept away. We must never allow that to happen.

That is why our Organisation, the Assembly and the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development are trying to work hard for European and international economic development and co-operation. For this, we work with the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Free Trade Association and many other organisations that are too numerous to mention. We work with national parliaments in the crucial fight against economic crime and corruption. We are trying to build bridges across economic borders, across seas and across continents as in our annual debates on OECD and the world economy.

The basic credo of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development is very well put by Mario Soares in his foreword to the Committee of Wise Persons report. He says, “democracy is a frail blossom." Do not believe for a moment that it can be upheld only because the Council of Europe has a Human Rights Convention or a new Human Rights Court. We are rightly proud of them, and we should be. They, like the Council as a whole, are extremely valuable institutions. However, without strong and sustained economic growth and without hope for a better future for millions of our citizens, our democratic structures could so easily be brushed aside by primitive forces lurking in the dark. Europe needs economic development and that can come only from co-operation, learning and sharing, reform, trade and sustainable investment.

THE PRESIDENT. - Thank you, Mrs Degn. I call Mr Glotov

Mr GLOTOV (Russian Federation) reiterated the praise of the rapporteurs expressed by the previous speakers. Criticism had been levelled at their work, but it had been appropriate criticism. It was just the beginning of a long and difficult debate on the future of the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly.