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Mr Vladimir VORONIN (*President of the Republic of Moldova*)
Mr President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to come back to Strasbourg (in a new capacity and to greet) my former colleagues in the Council of Europe

For ten years Moldova has made efforts to restructure its national economy based on market principles, economic freedom and private property. Without doubting those principles, I have to note that the price paid by my country's citizens for that restructuring is high. We shall continue to opt for building a market economy. Our adherence to the World Trade Organisation is eloquent proof of our intentions in that regard. Yet we cannot forget that the problem of poverty demands extraordinary measures from the Government of Moldova in order to solve it. That problem must also be perceived in the context of the construction of democracy and the implementation of European values. A poor man cannot be free. Democracy is built on free citizens - politically and economically. That has been proved by history many times, and the European Community should not tolerate the existence of a poor state in the middle of Europe. We also hope for close co-operation in this domain in order to alleviate another area of poverty in Europe. At the same time, we are well aware that only by mobilising internal resources and consolidating our own forces can the revival of the state and the dignity of its citizens be made possible.

It is known that poverty gives birth to corruption. Unfortunately, that scourge has not spared the Republic of Moldova. One of the priorities of our policy is to fight that phenomenon. We are determined to elaborate and accomplish urgent action to fight corruption in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the partially open Agreement of the Council of Europe on setting up the group of states against corruption - GRECO - to which the Republic of Moldova has recently agreed.

Mr President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the working agenda of the current session also includes a subject of great sensitivity to the Republic of Moldova: the trafficking of children and teenagers. That phenomenon, which is an increasing trend, represents a challenge for many European states and it must be fought by joint efforts. The Chisinau authorities co-operate with countries in the region to fight international networks in that illicit traffic. A recent decision of the Government of Moldova to suspend procedures for the adoption of children by foreign citizens was dictated by our intention to bring order to that matter.

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The Republic of Moldova is part of South-eastern Europe and so cannot ignore the escalation of violence in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", which constitutes a serious threat to peace and security in the region. In that context, I stress that the history of the twentieth century teaches us that the revision of borders and the creation of zones based on ethnic or religious criteria undermine security. The experience of our country proves that such problems must be solved exclusively by peaceful means. Therefore, we oppose any nationalistic or separatist temptations that contradict current European realities and the spirit of relations between states with a democratic identity. It is to our common benefit to look ahead and not backwards, and to work hard to respond to the expectations of the nations of South-eastern Europe for democratic reconstruction and prosperity.

Mr President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, the commitment to respect for and the development of human rights constitutes our common values and reflects our European identity. The Council of Europe, in its role as depository of the European experience in protecting and developing democratic values, represents a chance for all European nations to identify their own role in the new, continental architecture. The Council of Europe is the first pan-European organisation and represents, in a way unlike that of any other European institution, the unity of Europe. The Council of Europe has a mission to consolidate the rapprochement between the east and the west of the continent, and to harmonise its political, cultural and social dimensions.

The Republic of Moldova, together with all member states of the Council of Europe, has a responsibility to consolidate that continental foundation, through the commitment of every Moldovan citizen to the general human values of European civilisation. We are ready to fulfil this mission.

Thank you for your attention.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you, Mr President. Your address was direct. It covered all aspects of Moldova's difficulties in an open way and we thank you warmly for it. You have now agreed to answer questions and fifteen members of the Assembly have put down questions. With any luck, we will manage to take them all. I have grouped them according to policy similarity. I shall start with two questions on general policy from Mr Oliynyk and Mr Gross.

Mr OLIYNYK (*Ukraine*) welcomed the President of the Republic of Moldova and said that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Moldova were very important. He asked what policies were being developed to achieve that.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you. I call Mr Gross.

Mr GROSS (*Switzerland*)- I wish to ask you about the commitment to reform that was made by the former legislature, especially the statute of the president, the constitutional position of the president, the four-level court system and the election of the regional heads of administration by the people and not by nomination by central government.

THE PRESIDENT.- Thank you. I invite Mr Voronin to answer those questions.

Mr VORONIN expressed his thanks for the greetings he had received and said that, during an official visit to Ukraine, he had had constructive meetings with the authorities