

Statement by Franz Karasek on the objectives of the Council of Europe (Strasbourg, 3 October 1969)

Caption: On 3 October 1979, the Austrian Franz Karasek, recently appointed Secretary-General of the Council of Europe, makes a statement to the Parliamentary Assembly in which he outlines the activities of the Council of Europe for the next few years.

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Statement by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe

THE PRESIDENT. - The next Order of the Day is the statement by our new Secretary General. I welcome with great pleasure for the first time in our Parliamentary Assembly in his new role as Secretary General, Mr Karasek, whose term of office began yesterday morning. I feel confident that we shall have excellent co-operation with the Secretary General. He is well known to all members of the Assembly, and we can consider it a good omen that he understands the Assembly as well as, or even better than, most of us, having been an active member since September 1970.

As members are well aware, our organisation was the first European organisation founded after the war to include a parliamentary assembly. We set an example and paved the way, for instance, for the Western European Union Assembly, for the European Parliament and for more world-wide assemblies. They based their statutes on ours and adopted many of our procedures. As from today, however, we may wish to adopt a different philosophy about the tripartite co-operation among the Secretary General, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly.

The Secretary General plays a prominent role in co-ordination between the Ministers and the parliamentarians. In the past, that function has not always led to a maximum of harmony. There is room for improvement in many areas. An example is the constitution of the Office of the Clerk.

The wisdom of our three elected officers is responsible for ensuring proficiency and productivity within the Council of Europe. Also necessary are good organisation and the recruitment of the right personnel.

I am convinced, Mr Secretary General, that you understand these problems very well and will do your utmost to overcome them, because, apart from its being a challenge to you, you know that this is essential to promote the best personal relationships within our institution.

This may also be a moment to reflect whether certain changes - I am not speaking of the statutes - should be made in order to ensure greater *de facto* independence of the Parliamentary Assembly - a matter which is already being studied within the framework of the Committee on Rules of Procedure.

I leave this in your good and capable hands, Mr Karasek, and I repeat my very best wishes on behalf of all of us to you during your term of office. Welcome again.

Mr KARASEK (*Secretary General of the Council of Europe*) (Translation). - May I begin, Mr President, by thanking you for your kind and flattering words of welcome. I am certain that co-operation between us, between me and the Assembly, will not merely be satisfactory, for I shall make it my business to see that it is perfect. In any case, you can always count on me and on the attention I shall pay to anything you say to me.

A few months ago I had an opportunity to thank you for the confidence you showed in me by electing me to the post of Secretary General. The time has now come for me to set to work. I therefore wished to address you on the very first day of this session, so as to tell you about some of my beliefs and intentions for the coming years, which I hope will help me in my new function as Secretary General to bring the Council of Europe closer to its statutory objective of

"achieving a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress".

I am firmly convinced that the Council of Europe can carry on its work while taking due account of the

prerogatives of the other European institutions. Pessimism or disappointment at the process of integration or the roles of the various European institutions are a characteristic of those who think only in terms of procedures and do not go into the substance of things. For those who, by contrast, believe in the necessary progress towards ever greater unity between the peoples of Europe, substance is more important than form and the European will overcome any temporarily cosy scepticism.

The services constantly rendered by the Council of Europe, an instrument of harmonisation in the field of intergovernmental co-operation and a forum for political dialogue, are just as essential as those rendered by the other European institutions. In this matter there can be no alternation or hierarchy.

The diversity of resources and institutions at the service of European unification is a reflection of the diversity and plurality of our continent's peoples. Those peoples have constantly aspired to the achievement of a united Europe; their aspirations can be fulfilled provided that account is taken of this diversity and each institution is given the means of attaining its own objectives.

Although our organisation's objectives are clear, the ways of achieving them are sometimes strewn with pitfalls, for Western Europe too is at present undergoing a crisis affecting its political, economic and social life, indeed its moral and spiritual foundations.

But the crisis we are experiencing must - even more than the crises of 1951 - provoke an awakening, a new surge of energy on the part of Europeans, an increased interest in their common institutions. That depends on us; it depends on you. Our governments and parliaments are aware, and public opinion in our countries must realise, that our organisation is one of the instruments with which the challenge of our times can be met.

It is for us to justify daily the confidence of our governments, parliaments and fellow-Europeans, and to take the necessary steps to enable our organisation to carry on its work at the desired pace.

When speaking of the Council of Europe, I like to say "our" organisation, for the results of the Council's activities depend on both the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, as well as on harmonious relations between those two organs and their servant, the Secretary General.

You are therefore entitled to rely on the assistance of a servant showing imagination, energy and initiative.

If the Council of Europe is to help Europeans to face up to the challenge of our time and to assert its political role, it will need to pursue an outward-looking policy, both in Europe and vis-à-vis the world at large.

In the case of Europe such a policy implies greater consideration for the regions in our member states which have been less favoured during the rapid and profound changes that have occurred in our continent in the past few decades. I have in mind not only the countries of Southern Europe but also certain peripheral regions and all regions which have suffered from imbalances.

I know from experience how much importance the Assembly attaches to these fundamental problems and I shall do my best to ensure that your recommendations are followed up by effective and original action at intergovernmental level. In this way the democratic Europe of the Twenty-one will truly become the Europe of all its citizens, of all its regions.

An outward-looking policy is also needed in respect of the other countries of Europe which, for various reasons, are not members of our organisation.

While we do not share the political views of those countries, we can and should develop technical co-operation with them since that can only benefit Europe as a whole in accordance with the spirit of the Final Act of the European Conference on Security and Co-operation.

Certain of the Council of Europe's activities do, in fact, lend themselves to such co-operation, whether in the

fields of public health, social security, youth gatherings, conservation of the architectural heritage, scientific research, cultural co-operation or the environment.

Let me merely give as an example the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, which was recently opened for signature in Berne at the 3rd Ministerial Conference on the Environment. At present there are nineteen signatories to this convention, but it would be highly desirable if many non-member states were to accede to it as well - for, after all, migratory birds know no frontiers !

Finally the Council of Europe should pursue an outward-looking policy in regard to the world in general, by intensifying its relations with non-European countries, of course, but above all with other international organisations, both world-wide and regional. Our organisation can rightly pride itself on being the European guardian of the principles of parliamentary democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and it is in our greatest interest to share our experience with those who have set out or are about to set out on the same path elsewhere in the world.

For that reason, your discussions on the ECSC or the OECD report are of special importance. The same is true of the periodic exchanges of views held by the Committee of Ministers on the ECSC and the United Nations, but we should make these discussions still more effective by pursuing them in greater depth and extending them to other political subjects as well as technical ones.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, at this point I would like to mention one of our other priorities, which is the intensification and development of our co-operation with the European Community.

The Community occupies a special position among the organisations and institutions with which the Council of Europe has relations. More than ever, therefore, it is necessary that co-operation should be developed so as to ensure that our respective activities are fully complementary in practice. Complementariness is possible. A particularly interesting event in this respect is the publication of a memorandum by the Brussels Commission on the Community's accession to our Convention on Human Rights. And I cannot but welcome the fact that this matter of paramount importance is already the subject of a motion for a resolution to be submitted to your Assembly.

While appreciable progress has been made at intergovernmental level in co-operation between the Community and the Council of Europe, thanks in particular to the presence of the President, of members or of the Secretary General of the Brussels Commission at some meetings of the Committee of Ministers, the direct election of the European Parliament offers our Assembly a unique opportunity of reviewing its relations with that body. New arrangements must be sought, and I am sure we shall find them. For this, I place my trust in the imagination your Assembly has always displayed.

I would like to draw attention to another way in which we can achieve our objectives: this is to concentrate our work to a greater extent on sectors where it is really essential and where the Council of Europe can act with authority and experience. Both organs of the Council have, incidentally, already begun this process with the adoption of a medium-term plan and an annual programme of activities.

At a time when I am only just taking up my duties you will probably not expect me to set out my ideas on the priorities for our organisation. There will be an opportunity for this later, in the discussions on the adoption of the second medium-term plan. Nevertheless I should like to draw your attention forthwith to the work we have done and shall continue to do with success in the human rights field, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Court and Commission of Human Rights, to which I wish to pay a cordial tribute.

Our Statute requires us not only to safeguard but also to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is for that reason that I attach overriding importance to the follow-up to your Recommendation 838 on widening the scope of the European Convention on Human Rights, in the drafting of which our lamented friend, President Czernetz, played such an important part, as well as to the Declaration on Human Rights, adopted by the Council of Europe member states on 27 April 1978.

I am happy to tell you that senior government officials have begun to examine this question, and you may be sure the Secretariat will spare no effort to ensure that practical solutions are found.

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope to be able to perform as well as possible the arduous tasks you have entrusted to me. We must go forward step by step, adding one stone to another, not being too hasty nor neglecting anything.

I am delighted to have been directly involved in this stirring venture for which the support of the Assembly which elected me and of all our member governments is absolutely essential to me.

But the Secretary General is also at the head of an international secretariat of 800 officials whom he must lead. This is a responsibility to which I attach the greatest importance, for while the Secretariat possesses a considerable fund of intelligence, imagination and goodwill, it is no longer perhaps sufficiently motivated or adequately oriented.

I shall therefore endeavour to bolster its enthusiasm and give a greater *esprit de corps*, since it could not continue to do its job if it ceased to be united behind the Secretary General, who is responsible for the whole of the Secretariat's work.

Faithful to the oath I shall be taking in a few days' time. I intend with the full force of my convictions to exercise my responsibilities with complete independence, but also with full awareness of the aspirations of one and all. Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I give you this undertaking today.

Everyone here knows me, particularly you, Mr President. We have joined forces in our respective capacities within this very Assembly in order to promote that greater unity which is our statutory aim.

I know that I can count on your assistance in my new task, and in advance I express to you my deep gratitude. I do not ask for your indulgence, Mr President, nor the Assembly's. I do, however, hope and expect to have your confidence by earning it day by day. (*Applause*).